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MARIAN'S TRUST.

VOL. III.

MARIAN'S TRUST.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"URSULA'S LOVE STORY,"
"BEAUTIFUL EDITH,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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MARIAN'S TRUST.

CHAPTER I.

RESTLESS.

Come read to me some poem,
Some simple and heartfelt lay,
That shall soothe this restless feeling,
And banish the thoughts of day.

LONGFELLOW.

THE parting between Marian and Charley had been a remarkable one. There was all the hunger of the young man's heart plainly enough visible to her understanding spirit; but she thought she knew, even better than ever, that she had no pleasant answer to make to him.

"I wonder what you would have me do?" Charley had asked, with his honest

eyes full of a vague, grieving wonder. "I am sure you like me."

"Yes, Charley, I like you very much; I would have you marry an heiress."

"But I am a very good fellow about that kind of thing. I am never more than six months in debt. That's nothing—only just what can't be helped; and, indeed, what *ought to be*, in my opinion."

"I am not blaming you," Marian says. "I am only saying that I wish for you everything that is good."

"What has changed you?" Charley asks, with a curiously unconscious air.

"Heat and cold, Spring and Autumn, five times repeated."

"But we have all of us had that. I had two Summers in one year once, and very disagreeable it was," said Charley.

"And I have never had any Summer at all since we went away, till this year that I have been here."

"I begin to understand. It has all been

a horrid bore, I suppose. But it is your own fault now."

"Good-bye," said Marian.

"I am not going to give it up," said Charley.

"You'll be late. Good-bye."

"But you will remember what I say?"

"I have already forgotten. Good-bye again."

So she had left him, standing still on the gravelled road in front of Rosdew. And now she was at Trowberry Terrace. She could not help feeling restless. The necessity that she was under to work like a sempstress, and contrive new garments out of old ones, was wearying. But she took up her work with the old courage, and with even more than that, for it required more now than was enough six months ago. One day her mother said, grievously,

"I brought up a box from the Groves. Things out of that cupboard, Marian. Frederick and Lizzie are doing things."

"Ah! let them do," said Marian. "They are equal to anything; but we will work. You help me nobly."

She wanted soothing painfully. Would no human being sing to her some sweet song of hope and happiness? It would, six months before, have been an unnecessary luxury, but she wanted help sadly now.

Lizzie had caught cold, and she could not come and see them immediately; but old Mr. Naylor came, and Marian felt it sad to see the added dignity with which her mother received him, as if she would make a circumstance of her poverty, and of returning to her home, and giving him a welcome to it. Her mother was not made to take actively a martyr's part—her will was never thoroughly in it; but a certain fussiness, and even that little display of the emptiness of the land which now distinguished her, was painful to Marian, who had a matter-of-course manner of submitting to things which took off people's attention from *them.*

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Bellingsby's place. I wonder if he will be there?"

After this visit, when Marian left her mother behind, she went to Lady Florence, and stayed with her till they departed together for Lady Glaucott's northern home.

It was November, and the month was unusually fine. They had a prosperous journey, and after long years of absence the scenery of the northern counties seemed as new to Lady Florence as to Marian, who had never been in the north of England before.

When they reached the Towers, Marian was surprised by its grandeur. There was wild moor scenery, with piles of rock scattered over it, like places in her own dear western land, but greyer, colder, of greater extent, and a harsher aspect. But then there were also wooded hills and valleys, and rivers rivalling those she knew so well, and a sensation of size which almost bewildered her.

They reached the Towers by a wide road,

skirted by a steep wooded hill-side on the left, and having on the right fine park-like scenery of what looked like unlimited extent. They drove under a great stone portico, and when the open doors showed a warm-looking hall, with lights and a blazing fire, the first hand Marian touched was Charley Grandison's.

Such a welcome he gave them—he seemed not to know which to welcome first, or whom to welcome most. They went upstairs to Lady Glaucott's room, an amazing place, full of books, china, and all possible luxuries; and as she gave them tea, sitting before a matchless tea-service, Charley took a place by Marian's chair, and contrived to say how happy her coming made him.

"But no one ever told me it was so very grand and beautiful," said Marian.

"It is not half as nice as Rosdew, is it?" said Charley, with the newest air of being unexpectedly puzzled on his face. "I never thought it was. But there's grand scenery

here, to make up for the want of the sea. We have rock and wood, and a raving, roaring cataract. And those who have lived here have wisely only helped nature, and not made her submit to the impertinence of people who think they can improve what they can't make."

CHAPTER II.

THE WINTER-TIME.

'Tis true yon oaks with yellow tops appear,
And chilly blasts begin to nip the year;
From the tall elm a shower of leaves is borne,
And their lost beauty riven beeches mourn.

GAY.

"COME in; sit down."

Lady Florence said this to Marian, who had come to her room before dinner. Their rooms were near together, and had been chosen to please both, and ease Lady Florence's maid, who was to wait on Marian. Lady Florence, who was never idle, looked busy over a sketch.

"Why, it is the headland which we call the Black-rock!"

"I have several of such sketches to fill in. I had so seldom time to finish them on the spot. But what a lovely gown you have on, Marian! How very beautiful!—a silver muslin."

"No, only a silver muslin scarf, turned into an upper-skirt in this wonderful way. It came out of a great press at the Groves, which contained so many things. I thought they were gone—sold, or got rid of somehow; but Lady Glaucott had kept all safe for us. My mother brought this and other things back with her, and I did all this myself, partly after a pattern in a book—I hope you think me clever—and partly after a lady drawn by Frederick Naylor, entirely for my benefit. He and Lizzie invented this grand sash of velvet, and that was part of a gown of my mother's. I put on my dress, and made an exhibition of myself. Fred said it was right, and his dear old father thought I had lost my senses, and pitied me accordingly."

"It is all so nice," said Lady Florence. "There are plenty of people in the house—No, don't ask me who they are; you will find out their names by degrees. I have had a talk with Captain Grandison; I went back to Lady Glaucott's room to see him. He asked me to do so. He talked of you, Marian; he is really attached to you. You ought to understand that, you know."

"I do understand it. We are attached to each other. Of course I like Charley, I never did anything else; but he is not to make himself troublesome. I hope you told him that?"

"I so advised him, certainly; but he is very winning."

"Yes, that is exactly the word for him. He can beguile the birds out of their nests, and whistle them after him as he goes about the road. I have seen him do it. And he has a beguiling way with human beings; but he ought not to talk nonsense about me."

"He is jealous of Mr. Bellingsby. Danes-

ford is only six miles off. Mr. Bellingsby dines here to-day, and he spends three days here next week, and Captain Grandison thinks he likes you."

"And why not?" said Marian, in a voice which was so low that it made Lady Florence lift up her eyes and look at her.

"Well, it will be a good home, and I have liked him a long time; but I am sorry for Charley. He is so fine a creature—such a gentleman, and so pleasant! I think it would be cruel to settle it while he is in the house—to arrange it in Lady Glaucott's house, where his place is that of a son. It might be better done. Think of it, Marian."

Marian's face was crimson.

"There is nothing to think about," she said. "When I said 'Why not?' I only pleaded for my own liberty, and I cannot be deprived of that."

"Then let us go to the drawing-room," said Lady Florence.

In her heart she was saying, "How beau-

tiful she is!" and in her heart she was feeling very sorry for Captain Grandison. His appealing way of putting his case made her smile, and yet she liked him for it. He had never anything better to say than that he had never loved anyone else. He was so humble in his love. How was it that, being what he was, in all ways an unquestionably attractive person, he could never get Marian to talk to him seriously?

Perhaps it would have made him bolder if he could have known the truth—that she had loved him too well once, and that she could never do it again. So she smiled with Lady Florence over the dubious style of Charley's pleading, and refused steadily to listen to him. This time Charley had brought a friend with him—Sir Hector Trently. He was his great friend in the regiment, and to him—as Charley was one of those who are obliged tell their troubles, and who keep up hope by discussion—he had told his love-story, not quite from the beginning, but all

of it that had to do with the life he was then leading, and with the Marian of the present day. Charley was in a nervous anxiety as to what Sir Hector would think of Marian, and of how Marian would look and conduct herself towards him.

Sir Hector, who was older than Charley, and as perfect a gentleman as ever judged a lady, was so charmed with Marian that he hardly knew how to find words to express his approbation. He was as willing to talk as Charley was to hear; and talk they did that night, as they smoked with surprising perseverance, long after more reasonable people were asleep. Sir Hector always treated the engagement as a thing quite sure to be consented to. They talked themselves into a state of actual certainty. They took Marian to her first ball as a bride; they held imaginary conversations on her perfection; they knew what every officer would say, and every lady feel. It was all very silly, if not, in a sense, wrong. But young men are

tempted to give their imaginations the rein sometimes, in a smoking-room all to themselves.

It made Charley feel dismal, however, the next morning, when he contrasted smoking imaginations with the actual facts looked on by the bright sun of a frosty day. He saw Alfred talk to her, sit by her, interest her. He heard a plan made for their going to Danesford Hall to lunch. He knew, also, that they went there, while he stayed at home, dejected, bored, and angry. All this talking with Sir Hector had hurt Charley. It had made him very desperate; and his desperation made him jealous. He was angry with Alfred, and avoided him.

But Marian never suspected anything of all this. To her he was always gentle, gay, like a light-hearted boy, to whom it was enough for happiness that he should lie in the sun. She had plenty of pleasant talk with him. Their subjects of interest seemed to be endless, and he knew her well enough

to praise her and criticize her, and direct how the flowers should be mixed and made up which were brought to her daily for her beautiful hair.

Alfred Bellingsby never appeared to enter into the lists with Charley. He always seemed to look on the familiar terms existing between them as the most natural thing in the world—a thing he had himself seen ever since he could remember either of them. But his own conduct was a great contrast to that on which he looked. He was gentle, diffident, and very quiet; but he made Marian very soon feel that he was in earnest. The thought thrilled through her. It was a strange love-making. She had a distinct feeling of his love being an honour to her. She knew that he would never forget Patty; she thought it a great thing that he should choose her to take her place. He was at this time a most agreeable person to look at. There was the quiet simplicity of great strength of charac-

ter about him, and it attracted her to him forcibly.

This preliminary state of things lasted for several days, Alfred being there, and Lady Glaucott going, more than once, in their drives to Danesford Hall.

After a week had passed, their party was increased by the arrival of Dr. Perran from Portspadron, and of Mr. and Mrs. Garret Naylor. Everbody's spirits rose to the highest point. It was one of the most pleasant and friendly parties ever met together in a country-house.

Lady Florence watched Marian, and she found it simply impossible to guess at what she really felt. But so agreeable an atmosphere, having dangerous materials so near at hand, could not last undisturbed very long.

Once or twice Charley Grandison had been distinctly uncivil to Alfred Bellingsby. Dr. Perran had been visibly annoyed, and Sir Hector had remonstrated, advising Charley to propose to the lady immediately, and

abide by her decision. So Charley took his friend's advice, and, speaking to Marian in Lady Florence's presence, asked her to consider his case once more.

"It does not require any consideration," she said; "we are not lovers, and you know it—you *do* know it, Charley." She did not look at him when she said this; but she took his hand, with her eyes cast down. "You should be kinder, and not pursue me seriously in this way. It makes me sad."

"Good night, Lady Florence."

The only way in which Charley chose to accept his dismissal was by saying that. He gave Marian his hand, and then walked away.

After Lady Florence had that night dismissed her maid, she went into Marian's room. The poor girl, vexed and harassed, dropped her head on her friend's shoulder, and burst into a fit of weeping. Then, by

the fire, in the midst of sobs and tears, she told Lady Florence how he had been the life of her girlhood, how she had bid him good-bye upon her knees, how she had misinterpreted his "*Trust me, Marian.*" She poured out her whole heart, and the history of her life lay before her friend in characters easy to read.

"There are some things that I could not do twice. That which was my greatest joy in my days of perfect happiness, and which failed me in my desperate grief, *won't revive.* And Charley is so ignorant of what I am—of that which I think I have become. I believe that his perfect good-humour and buoyant light-heartedness would worry me in time. He does not know what a strife life may be; and I have fought it through, single-handed, for others and myself. Really, there is no sympathy between us."

"I think it quite possible that Herbert might have guided him beyond that which was prudent and right."

"Very likely. But Herbert did not know that I had loved him. And he had never been told—how could he?—of the thousand ways in which Charley had worked to show what he felt for me. That I over-estimated his regard I am quite willing to believe—I do believe it. But is he not always saying that we loved each other *once?* And could any woman forgive a man for neglecting her, after consultation with a brother?—doing it knowingly, and with intention. I hope I may never believe that he loved me. I should hate him if I did!"

She had talked herself calm, though her words were forcible.

"I could not have a bad opinion of Captain Grandison," said Lady Florence, gently. "We must make allowance for the difference of people's characters. The strength of his has perhaps never been brought out."

"He will always be a brave, good man, and a gentleman," said Marian.

And they spoke no more just then of

Charley Grandison, but of other things: the blessing of a true friend—the strength that one heart can gather from another.

"I wonder if you understand me?" Marian asked, as Lady Florence rose up to leave her.

"Yes; as well, perhaps, as feelings are ever understood. I understand enough to give you credit for doing right. But your life has done something to you. What is it?"

"It has given me a clear sight and a wise judgment. I am often thankful for my life, but it has unfitted me for a husband who lives upon hope. For this life's things I have no hope. Life is a battle, and a brave heart is *sure* to conquer. How could a woman, made up of common sense and perseverance, take up life with a happy, don't-care, and a never-mind, let-us-hope sort of a creature?"

"And is there no hope in Alfred Bellingsby's life?" inquired Lady Florence, with a smile.

"Mr. Bellingsby could understand me. If I told him, as I *may* tell him, that, but for my mother and my loneliness, I would live and die an old maid, he would understand me, and marry me, nevertheless."

That night, which they neither of them ever forgot, they opened their window-shutters, and looked out upon the still, clear starlight. A chill blast rose, and, passing by, stirred the dry leaves on the ground at the edge of a plantation which came near to the house. The starlight was so bright, and the stars seemed to be so many—they looked up with dazzled eyes to the brilliant sky.

"There is not a cloud now, but this north wind will bring us snow before long," said Lady Florence. "But it is a fine country just here, and snow is a sight of great beauty, and, followed by a good frost, it brings plenty of merry-making. I remember it all when I was a girl."

CHAPTER III.

AN EVENING.

When giant-like forms lengthen fast o'er the ground,
From the motionless mill to the linden-trees round—
When the stillness below, the mild radiance above,
Softly sink on the heart, and attune it to love.

ALARIC WATTS.

THE next day, just after dusk, when the elder ladies of the party in the house had most of them gone early to their rooms for rest before dressing for dinner, and when the younger visitors were just returned from a long walk, which had been determined on at luncheon, just at this hour Lady Florence, knowing that Marian had refused to join the walking party, went to her room to seek her. But Marian was not there. The

woman-servant said she had gone out, and was not returned. Her walking-dress had been put ready, as usual, and its absence was positive proof of her being gone out. It made Lady Florence a little uncomfortable. The lateness of the hour, the darkness coming on—Marian's knowing so little of the walks about the grounds—alarmed her friend, for she felt sure that the girl was alone.

As Lady Florence went back to her own room, she stood still for a moment at the top of the great staircase. She thought that, in the stillness, she heard a voice and a step; the closing of a door made her expect Marian, so she stood still. The air was warmed, and there was a comforting great red velvet curtain hanging drawn across the huge stone mullioned window which in the day-time gave light to the house. A great lamp was burning. Lady Florence heard the step again, and then Marian's voice, like a sigh, as she came up

slowly—"I pray to be strong enough!" There was a shadow—only one—against the ruby-tinted walls.

"To whom are you speaking?" said Lady Florence, looking over the banisters. "Marian, who is there?"

"I am alone," she said, in a whisper, looking up to where Lady Florence stood. "How bright you look up there!—how warm and delightful the house is!" She had got close to her friend now, and she went on talking. "I am late; I did not expect to see anyone. Everybody is dressing for dinner, I suppose?"

She stood still, and Lady Florence looked her steadily in the face. Gradually she had found it to be a page very easily read, but she could not read it now.

"You are not very late," she said; "only it is late for you to be out by yourself."

"I have not been by myself," said Marian. "Mr. Bellingsby has been with me."

"And why did you wonder about your

strength? I could not help hearing you—it was so perfectly quiet, and I was watching for you. You said that you prayed to be strong enough. What did you mean? What would you do if you were strong enough?—strong enough for what?"

"Say it! Did I say it? I only thought it. You are a witch, Lady Florence."

"Whatever I am, we can't come to confessions in the midst of this great house, I suppose. You must tell me at some other time."

Lady Florence looked earnestly into Marian's face; and Marian saw that she did so.

"This warm air is so comfortable," she said. "I like oak staircases and panelled walls; I like old pictures; and I am not sure that treading on velvet-pile carpets is not the nicest walking in all the world."

She said this oddly, in a hurry, with a bright face, and looking at Lady Florence with a sort of daring expression in her eyes, which her friend had never seen before.

"So something has happened?" She waited an instant, to give Marian an opportunity of speaking again; but not a word came. Then, from below, the gong sounded. "We must part now," said Lady Florence.

"And when I am ready, I may come to you, and go down with you?"

"Of course."

So Marian lighted the candle that waited for her using on a table close to where they stood, and she turned away and went immediately to her room. There was that about Marian which made Lady Florence very uncomfortable. All through the time of dressing she reflected upon her. It was painful to know that a moment had come in this young woman's life when she had got to provide for herself, when her mother could do better without her than with her, when the choice that lay before her she was almost *forced* to use, when it would be imprudent to refuse to choose at all, because there was

nothing else to do and no time to wait. While she was thinking about her, she came into the room.

"I am so glad you are ready—we can have five minutes' talk."

"Let me admire you first of all." And Lady Florence kissed her tenderly, though she could scarcely keep down a sigh. Undoubtedly Marian looked lovely, with her dark, bright brown hair crowned with white flowers, and the brilliant green of a spray of ivy gleaming among its folds. She wore a dress of rose-coloured Indian silk, with black lace draped over it, thickening in folds and patterns, with the front of the dress square, like an old picture; and soft white lace was nestling almost up to her throat, which was bound by a wide black velvet, from which hung a glittering star.

"I want you to look at this grand ornament, not at me," said Marian. "Lizzie has

the fellow to it—they came out of the snuff-boxes, you know."

"The snuff-boxes!"

"Yes. There were three. They were all in the wonderful cupboard. We divided them. Herbert keeps his in the original shape; Lizzie and I got these things constructed out of the gold and the brilliants—of course Frederick did it all."

"I admire it very much; but I admire *you* too."

She looked at her with loving eyes; and Marian said,

"Don't be kind to me. If you do I shall break down. I have thought so much of the words I said, without knowing I said them. You really heard me speak?"

"Yes; and I too have been wondering. What did it mean, Marian?"

"I always tell you everything exactly as I feel it. When I reveal anything to you, I reveal it perfectly. I can't help being *true* to you."

As she spoke she looked straight at the fire, not at Lady Florence, but as if she were making the assertion to the flames flickering up, blue and white, and yellow and red, from the fire before her.

"Lady Florence, I thought I felt more for Charley Grandison than I knew of. I thought that perhaps I was not quite sure whether I was strong enough to marry anyone else. I am not going to marry *him*, remember. But it goes against my nature to vex him too deeply. What I should have liked would have been for Charley to marry first. Oh! I could dance at his wedding! But if I were strong enough I would marry Mr. Bellingsby in a month.

"You really are very much attached to Captain Grandison?"

"Yes."

"Then marry him."

"That is another thing."

"You surprise me, dear girl. Lady Glaucott and I have talked it over. She is very

anxious for it. I have no doubt that Charley will be richer one day. She is not old, but she is sure to leave him something, and everybody is agreed that it would be quite a pity for you to marry a rich man—you would make such an excellent poor man's wife."

It is to be suspected that Lady Florence said this a little maliciously. It was quite true that the thing had been said, but she, who had felt the cruelty of burdening a woman for life, because she had shown herself capable, for five years, of self-annihilation and uncomplaining work, must stand accused of some malice for having so courageously repeated it. She calmly looked at Marian, to see how her words were taken.

"That is what the world gives one for having suffered in it. I know it is said. I have sat quite still, like a piece of stone, and listened to it. But there is no question of money in my mind when I think of marriage and Charley Grandison."

"How surprising! I cannot understand any woman hesitating between two men."

"I am so glad my mother is not here; she would be seriously sorry because I cannot marry both. But really, Lady Florence, there is not anything surprising in my state of mind. I like Mr. Bellingsby, his position and his life. I can trust him. He trusts me. As to the other, there is nothing new to say—only I can't bear to vex him; and he is vexed. And Charley vexed is a new horror, and it scares me. I don't like it at all."

"Let us go downstairs. I never like being the last," said Lady Florence. She had an uncomfortable sensation that Marian had given utterance to an unpleasant truth. She put her hand on Marian's arm, and said, "I understand you, and I will advise you. If you say Yes to Mr. Bellingsby, ask him not to let it be known till our visit here is over."

"We can tell *you*."

"Yes; and he can visit us in London. You can come and stay with me."

It was always a pretty sight to see Marian come into a room, especially when, as now, there were plenty of her friends and admirers in it; admirers within that wide limit which takes in men and women, strangers and friends. Among them stood Mr. Bellingsby and Captain Grandison. They both stepped back, and both were smiled upon for making way for Lady Florence and Marian. There were those there who remarked how quick and ardent was the expression on Charley's face as he looked after Marian with free, honest, open worship in his face; and how the quieter Mr. Bellingsby dropped his eyes, and stood as if rendering her grave homage as she passed by.

Lady Glaucott smiled and gave Marian an approving glance. Sir Hector stepped forward to speak to her.

When the guests were all seated at the

dinner-table, it was seen that Marian was placed between her two lovers, and that Sir Hector sat by Lady Florence. Lady Glaucott's dinner-table was always a beautiful sight; it represented at all points an entertainment, and those assembled felt always the consolatory truth that they formed a part of a goodly company. So there sat Marian in glowing beauty, and praying for strength still, though this time in unuttered words; and not without cause did she feel that she wanted the gift, for, mixed up in her mind with sensations as to the sparkling glass and the shadows of hot-house plants on snowy damask, and the inconceivable brightness of silver, blossoming into lily flowers, and lying about in broad great crumpled leaves opposite to her upon the tablecloth, was the knowledge that Mr. Bellingsby was thinking of what they had been saying to each other in the gathering dusk, and that Charley looked capable of any amount of rash-doing if she spoke

to Alfred more than she spoke to him.

"I thought," said Lady Florence, "that you took Mrs. Naylor to dinner, Sir Hector. How did you get here? You should have been where Captain Grandison is."

"Spare me, pray; I ought not to suffer because I stood by my friend."

"And who is your friend?"

"Grandison, of course. I used to hear Charley talk of her when we were together in Canada. I was delighted to have this opportunity of knowing her."

"They have known each other for several years," was the cautious reply.

"It is to be a knowledge brought to a happy ending, of course."

"I don't know what you mean by 'of course.' Boys and girls who are devoted admirers do not marry as men and women, I think—or not very often."

Sir Hector laughed, and then they proceeded to talk on other matters. But Lady Florence watched Marian, and she thought

that her behaviour was perfect. They were all three engaged in discussing some subject, and it seemed to Lady Florence's acute sensations that it required the exercise of some discretion to keep Captain Grandison in order. Mr. Bellingsby was calm, but Charley's nervous agitation was more than once plainly perceptible.

Lady Glaucott had filled her house with her old friends, and many of them knew Captain Grandison very well. Others, besides Lady Florence, became aware of something unusual in Captain Grandison's manner the fact being that he was extremely jealous, and very angry with everything that made him so.

Still Marian behaved charmingly and with discretion. Her gentleness, her self-possession, her easy style of giving and receiving on both sides, made her more than ever attractive, and sometimes a subdued smile on Alfred Bellingsby's well-disciplined lips seemed to show that he saw, felt, and thoroughly

appreciated her charm, and her quiet womanly way of keeping Charley in order.

Alfred was perfectly untroubled, and he was evidently bent on peace. But peace before women is often only a promise of war behind their backs; and it was by no means impossible that Captain Grandison might be provoking Alfred to some such resolution—so thought Lady Florence, reproaching herself, however, secretly, the moment afterwards; telling herself that it was all her own silly nervousness, disadvantageously interpreting a case of three persons being excessively pleasant and agreeably animated all round.

As soon as they were in the drawing-room again, Marian said to Lady Florence, "Come with me."

They left the others grouping round the fire, and walked down the room into the little library; for the large room had a smaller one at each end, and Marian now led the way into that which contained books

and writing-tables, and from which a door opened into the great hall.

"What is that?" was Lady Florence's exclamation on first coming out of the glare of lamp and candle-light into the soberer illumination made by a blazing fire. Something was reared up, looking like the bent but gigantic figure of a man. "It quite startled me."

"Oh!" said Marian, with a little laugh, and walking straight up to it, "how odd it looks! I suppose the servants were ignorant of the causes that brought it here, and it is so artificially stretched on the fire-screen, and flung over the arm-chair, that, of course, they dared not touch it. It is Charley Grandison's huge Canadian cloak. He was showing it to us. Sir Hector was describing its perfections, and we had it produced. Is it not a very odd-looking fur? See how it is trimmed, and tagged, and strapped; and this woolly material is as odd as the fur. What a weight!"

She was trying to fold it, when the door that led into the hall opened, and in walked the owner. He was looking hurried—vexed, perhaps; but his countenance cleared when he saw who was standing there.

"This is lucky," he said, in a whisper. Then he softly closed the door which led into the drawing-room. "My good star must be helping me. Marian," he said—no voice ever expressed such earnestness as his did when speaking the name by which he had called her from her childhood—"Marian, I must have it all out now. I am so utterly miserable, I can't give up hope. I am so wretched in my fear. Marian, surely you are mine!"

"Hush!—hush, Charley! No!"

She, too, whispered her words, but with a terrible power. There was kindness, sympathy, almost sorrow in her voice; but she had said unhesitatingly the dreadful "No!" and, having said it, she looked him calmly in the face. He went ghastly pale.

"Are you engaged to Alfred Bellingsby?"

"No."

"Then there is hope still?"

"No." It was as if she could say nothing else. Her strange calm never forsook her. She was the very impersonation of courage, and yet she was gentle and kind; only the terrible "No!" was always said without an instant's hesitation.

There was a pause.

"And you are not going to marry Bellingsby?"

"Why do you think he has asked me?"

"He will." She never spoke. "You know that the thought of being your husband has been the happiness and blessing of my life."

"That is not true."

There was no reproach in her manner of saying this. It dropped from her lips as a contradiction which his assertion made necessary; and he once more turned as pale as a dying man under her gentle courage.

"You have returned, after five years of absence from me; you had been back before, but never tried to see me. You have never forgotten me—I can believe that; but that I have been all that you have said is an imagination."

"But five years ago you loved me," he said. "Have mercy on me, and tell me that you loved me—tell me that I was not such a fool as to imagine that."

Her face glowed with the loveliest smile.

"Be what you call a 'fool,' Charley—it is better than being a knave. If you thought I loved you—but you never thought about it—if I loved you—you see, I put it plainly—if I loved you five years ago, what became of my love? What would my life have been with your neglect or indifference added to all other griefs? Do you think I should be alive to speak to you now? But be content. You were not either knave or fool; you were my dear, kind, bright, accomplished playfellow. But the playtime

of life was over too soon with me, and my playfellows went with it."

He looked puzzled, as if he were really wondering whether he had thrown away the gift he was seeking, as if he were turning over the possibility of his having wounded her when he was doing the prudent thing, and keeping out of her sight.

"But you could love me now, if you tried," he said. "All that I thought I ought to do, I did as bravely as I could. I have never cared for anyone else. Don't turn against me now."

"I cannot say that I will love you, or try to love you," she said. "The truth is that the boy-and-girl love is forgotten. I am really happy to see you again, really—let me go on being happy. No, don't turn away—let me, I say, go on being happy in the friendship of one who knew the old days, the dear old glorious good days, when we had never known any of the heart-

breaking troubles of life. Ah! so few know anything of that life, and you know all. The mere thought of you, in the midst of that life, is inexpressibly tender. I plead to you, you see. I plead for kindness. But I am not going to be your wife. Please to go. And don't speak again. Go, go!"

He threw that strange cloak of fur across his shoulders, and he went away, obeying her, literally, without a word. He went out into the front hall, closing the door noiselessly, and never spoke. Then she sat down in a chair, and shed tears plentifully. But she wept softly, as one who sorrows, and pities, and prays; not as one who battles with rebellious thoughts, and is breaking the will and crushing the heart.

Lady Florence stood still, resting a hand on the chimney-piece, and looking into the fire. But she never spoke. Very soon Marian rose, and dried her eyes. She went to a writing-table, where *eau de Cologne* was

to be had from a bottle that was always there, and she wiped off from her face all traces of tears. Then she and Lady Florence went back to the drawing-room together.

CHAPTER IV.

A FROSTY NIGHT.

Secure that nought of evil could delight
To walk in such a scene on such a night.

BYRON.

IT was a clear fine night, very cold, and the servants said, in answer to a question put by Lady Glaucott, that there had been a shower of snow.

"Yes," said Mrs. Garret Naylor, "my maid told me just now that, from what looked like one great cloud in an otherwise cloudless sky, there had been a full half-hour's fall of sleet and snow. And now the shrubs are like silver, and the light curiously strong. I believe all the servants are out looking at it."

"It is freezing hard," said one of those who were coming in from the dining-room. "We shall be living in a world of crystals to-morrow; and there will be no hunting. What shall we do?"

"Well," said Mr. Garret Naylor, with a smile at his wife, "I like holiday, but I enjoy comfort amazingly. This good fire-side suits me best. But there is a party in the hall, clothing themselves for a walk—they are going to see the trees with their powder on."

"It is really very beautiful," said Lady Glaucott. "Captain Grandison was wishing he might have the opportunity of showing it to Sir Hector. There are masses of old evergreens about the cataract which make the place dark and dim, and afford a grand contrast to the snow-covered branches of taller trees, and the rocks, and leaping water rushing away to the pond below, which looks black by night from being so completely overshadowed—I assure you it

is a strange sight. I have gone there myself with a party of courageous friends sometimes, and have always felt wonder-struck.

"Are any ladies going now?" asked Mrs. Garret Naylor; but her husband looked alarmed, and said,

"No, my dear Mary, no; of course not. And I would not have you go for the world. Why, the men were making preparations as if they were going to Siberia. Grandison is putting on that wonderful Canadian cloak that we were examining today; and Sir Hector was laughing at him for turning his trowsers up so carefully. But he had got such a pair of snow-boots. That is the way to do the thing, if you are determined to forget that a seat in such a room as this is about the best thing in the world."

"Charley always does everything in such a business-like manner. It amuses me very much," said Lady Glaucott.

"A very good character of him," answered Mr. Garret Naylor, sugaring his tea with

precision, and adding the cream slowly, and with consideration. "If I see a man always ready for everything, and yet doing his work as if he had time to prepare for it well, and perfect it completely, then I have good hopes of that man, and I have never been disappointed. Yes, the sleet lies thickly on the ground, and everyone of them seemed to be in such a hurry. But there was Grandison deliberately rolling up his trowsers to get them to the top of his boots. He's a droll fellow, up to anything, but with such an unexpected amount of management and contrivance in him. He was always a favourite of mine."

"Thank you," said Lady Glaucott, in a soft, low voice. "I like to hear him praised."

"Upon my word they make me feel old," said Mr. Naylor, laughing over the remembrance of the scene among the young men in the hall. "I shall see the sight by daylight to-morrow, and I daresay see it

just as well. We'll go together, Mary."

Tea was over. First one and then another of the young men returned, and, after making themselves presentable, re-appeared among the ladies. They came in with bursts of eloquent description of the wonders of the Winter scenery amongst which they had been wandering. They declared it to have been worth all the trouble, and congratulated themselves on the pleasure that the snow-shower had given them. They came in so noisy, fresh, and rosy, bringing the scent of the outer air pleasantly back with them, and for a time engaging everybody's attention.

"All at home at last," said Lady Glaucott. "I am very glad you all thought the sight fine enough to repay you for the cold and trouble."

"It was a grand and a lovely sight," said Captain Grandison. "Winter is the time to enjoy this place. Starlight, Winter, and sleet! No one can say more for a place

than that. The yews and laurels, the great red-trunked arbutus, and those grand fir-trees. Such a group they make! And the flat-sided, steep, worn-away rocks, where the cataract rushes down. I declare I never saw anything finer than that sight of wood and water. Better a thousand times than walls and firelight"

He was talking nervously. It was not at all his way to say so much on a subject. There was something strikingly unusual in his manner. It was impossible not to observe it, and everyone appeared to be more or less surprised at his rather loud-voiced eloquence.

Marian looked at him once, and Lady Florence's quiet eyes took note of it. She looked at him shyly for a moment, with a painful look of fear on her face. "If he would only hold his tongue!" was written there legibly enough for those who had been so far instructed as to read it.

"However," said Mr. Naylor, "you are all come home."

Mr. Naylor had a gentle but positive way of uttering short sentences sometimes in a manner which generally succeeded in leading people away from a subject, if he chose to think it exhausted. He spoke now in this sort of way, and Charley, not at all pleasantly, but very loudly, said, "Yes, all come home." Then Marian spoke. Her voice was sweet, clear, and low, but in the silence caused by Charley's strange manner, it commanded instant and universal attention.

"I thought that some one said Mr. Bellingsby had gone." Then, looking round, "Where is he?"

People turned their heads, and took sweeping glances of observation all round the room. It was as if a perceptible shiver had shaken everyone there, and anxious, echoing voices said, "Oh! where is he?"

The next moment everyone began to

speak. One said one thing, and one another. Charley Grandison laughed. Sir Hector left the room to look for Mr. Bellingsby in his bed-chamber.

"Of course he is gone to bed," said Captain Grandison, laughing again. "Let us order some posset. What do you recommend, Miss Harcourt?"

She was quite deaf to his words. She rose up, and walked to where Lady Florence was standing, and looked into her face with a strange, unreadable countenance. Lady Florence walked across the room with her to a distance from the group of busily-talking people near the fire; then Marian said,

"He asked me to be his wife this afternoon, and he was to have his answer before night. It is to be *yes*. He is so good, patient, thoughtful, kind. I think he is the best man in the world. He behaved so well at dinner. Charley did all he could to provoke him. I am very angry with

Charley. I hope and trust——Why am I so frightened? I wish he would come."

The door was opened, and she looked quickly towards it. It was Sir Hector who came in.

"He is not to be found—he is not in the house," he said. "That, at least, is certain."

Then there arose a confusion of voices. Lady Glaucott said that Mr. Bellingsby knew the grounds very well. "He has known this place for the last five years," she said.

"The better he knows this place, the odder it is that he has not returned," said Mr. Garret Naylor.

"I should order out men with sticks and guns; there might be something uncomfortable," said Sir Hector.

Some of the ladies were heard declaring that nothing short of the worst of sprained ankles could make them forgive Mr. Bellingsby for the fright he was causing them; and then everybody pretended to remember suddenly that it might be slippery.

"We shall do well to compose an advertisement for that interesting column in the *Times*," said Captain Grandison. "'Stolen or strayed,'—no, that's the dog-stealing fashion. 'Missing,'—that's it—'Missing, a gentleman of quiet demeanour, about thirty years of age, curiously dressed in——'"

"Hold your tongue!" said Lady Glaucott, with her hand on his shoulder, and he had the wit to see that he was not to go on.

Is it that people are really capable of feeling the presence of evil, even when that evil is not in actual sight? It is certainly true that everyone at the Towers felt that there was something wrong in the air, and feared that they should hear some sad story that night. Marian, with pale lips, said to Lady Florence,

"I shall go away. I wish you could come too. I can't stay here in the midst of all this."

Then Lady Florence, without answering

her, or saying a word to anyone, carried her off to her own dressing-room silently, Marian thanking her humbly in her heart.

The fire in the cheerful room burned brightly. Lady Florence took her place in an arm-chair, and Marian, instead of taking possession, as she was intended to do, of the chair which stood opposite, knelt down on the rug, and leaned her head against Lady Florence's arm.

"I am so cold. I can't help trembling. Why did he go? I wish I knew the worst. How weak I am to bear so badly only this small suspense! How Charley's voice jarred! Did you not feel it?" she asked.

"Captain Grandison's voice was not likely to be particularly musical to-night, after our interview in the library. I think you must have patience with him. He has had, I suspect, but few occasions for the practice of much self-control, and his position is an odd one. I am glad to think that you really prefer Mr. Bellingsby."

"Who could help it?" Marian asked, almost pettishly. "What is the use of Charley talking of the years of childhood and girlhood—the old days of home, affluence, and happiness. What good are such memories of things which the great sorrow-flood obliterated, and made as if they had never belonged to us? In the midst of the misery his voice—the only voice that could have helped me—was silent! And he is clamourous about *my* forgetting *him!* Mr. Bellingsby is a brave man, and a generous one. He can marry a portionless woman, and he is a peaceable, worshipping lover. I have talked it all out again and again. I talk it all out to myself over and over. If I were in love with two men at one time—and I declare that I know no reason why I shouldn't be—I should do right in taking the dear, good, rich, educated, safe one!" And then she burst into a fit of crying, hiding her face in her hands.

Lady Florence wisely let her alone. Her

sobs subsided after a time, and then came whispered wishes that something could be known, that some news could come to them.

More than an hour passed. The anxiety became breathless. Lady Glaucott, with a white face, visited them once.

"I am glad you are here," she said. "No one can go till we hear something. I shall come again soon." But she did not come.

Soon after she had left them alone together, Marian raised her head quickly.

"I hear steps," she said. "They are outside."

She drew the curtains, and opened the window-shutters. It looked as if the green space below her was crowded with black forms. Lady Florence went to the top of the stairs, and stood just where she had been when Marian came in from her walk. She heard the sounds of shuffling feet and of hushed voices; and then she heard the library door open. She went a few steps

lower down, that she might see as well as hear. She saw people bringing in what looked like the wrapped-up body of a man carried on a short ladder. Sir Hector, who was below, happened at this moment to look up, and, when he saw Lady Florence, he came to her quickly.

"We found him under the wooden bridge that crosses the water at the foot of the cataract. He is hurt, but we do not know to what extent. He can speak. He says that he fell, and that is all we know about it. But Dr. Perran has sent for a surgeon. That may not mean anything bad, however, as, being a guest in the house, he might not choose to undertake a serious case alone."

"I suppose not," said Lady Florence, feeling bewildered.

"When they have made him as comfortable as they can—they are at work with mattresses and sofas—I will come and tell you more."

"Make no ceremony. Come to my

room door. Miss Harcourt is with me."

Then Sir Hector went downstairs, and Lady Florence returned to Marian. She told her all that Sir Hector had said. Marian heard it on her knees, with her face hidden against the cushions in the chair.

Time passed on. It was difficult to keep count of how it went that night, when sometimes five minutes seemed like half an hour. But perhaps within the hour from his leaving Lady Florence on the stairs, Sir Hector Trently knocked at the door. They were both at the same moment struck by a sort of strange stiffness in his appearance and manner. They all three stood for a few instants silent before the fire. Then he spoke.

"Miss Harcourt, in the absence of Dr. Perran, whom Mr. Bellingsby first inquired for as his friend, he sent for me. Dr. Perran and the surgeon, who has now arrived, were having a preliminary consultation together; in his absence Mr. Bellingsby sent

for me. He wishes to see you alone, or, if you prefer it, in the presence of Lady Florence. His words were very earnest. He was most urgent that you should see him. I am commissioned to say this to you very strongly. But I am also to say that, as he desires to speak of private affairs, I must take him Lady Florence's solemn word that she will keep absolutely secret all that he has to say."

"I promise to keep his confidence inviolate," said Lady Florence. "I will keep out of hearing if he likes."

"I almost think he might prefer to have a witness—for Miss Harcourt's sake, I mean. He has not confided anything to me. They will come and tell us when he is fit to see you."

There was a pause of a minute, and then Sir Hector said,

"But that is not all that I have to say. Mr. Bellingsby told me that he was to receive from Miss Harcourt this night an an-

swer to a very important question. I know what that question is. I know what that man is. I congratulate you. Stop,"—seeing she was going to speak—"Grandison has told me everything, As he is now quite certain that he has no chance with you, he is gone."

"Gone?" exclaimed Lady Florence.

"Gone?" repeated Marian.

"Yes, gone. I think you need not wonder. We were both to have left here the day after to-morrow. This place, with everyone's interest naturally fixed on Bellingsby, cannot be a good place for Grandison. He is gone. And I am commissioned with his adieu to you both."

"How?" asked Marian, still wonderstruck.

"He and his groom are gone in the dog-cart to catch the mail-train. His hunter, which he brought with him, he has sold to Mr. Garret Naylor. The transaction, including the payment of the money, did not take ten

minutes. He is quite right. He can't afford to keep two horses. If he wants an extra mount, I can always give him one. He will get on if they drive pretty smartly. They have two hours for the sixteen miles to the Great Junction. My man packs his portmanteau, and it will travel with me. We shall meet in a few days, I hope."

Then there was another short silence. Sir Hector had acquitted himself so well of his commissions that there was nothing left to say.

"Well, I'll go now," he said, after a few minutes. "He may be ready for you by this time."

Very soon, with shawls round them, for a strange chill had fallen on both, those two women, trembling visibly, went to the library door. They entered the room, and Marian went up to the couch on which Mr. Bellingsby lay, with the firelight dancing wildly on his pale and wounded face.

CHAPTER V.

A STORY.

What impious tongue, ye blushing saints, would dare
To hint that aught but Heaven hath placed you there?
MOORE.

"LEAVE us now, doctor," gasped Mr. Bellingsby, speaking to Dr. Perran, as Marian advanced to the bed-side. "You shall come back again soon."

It seemed to Lady Florence that he who spoke bore only a fearful sort of resemblance to the gentle-voiced, honest-spoken man, whom they had so lately seen in perfect health. She stood aside in great and even solemn fear. People talk of seeing death in a human being's face—Lady Florence thought she saw it in Alfred Bellingsby's.

Marian went up to the couch and knelt down, taking his hand.

"Move the candle, if you please," he said, to Lady Florence.

So she moved the light till the full glow fell on Marian's face. She knew that he wanted to see everything that might be found there. He looked at her silently for a minute, as if daring in that great moment to gaze at her with a scrutiny he had never used before; and Marian, as if she guessed what was in his mind, remained motionless while his eyes rested on her beautiful head, and wandered over her lovely face. She knelt there, holding his hand, most meekly, giving herself up to his loving will, and waiting till he had looked at her long enough, and was ready to speak. He spoke soon. He spoke in that voiceless way which it was impossible to hear without the worst forebodings.

"I wanted my answer," he said. "Now, before the doctor comes again. I have had

a fall, and no one yet can guess what the consequences may be. Can you say anything to me, seeing me as I am?"

"Yes—I can say *yes*—let me say *yes*, whatever may be the end."

"I may be maimed. I may be a cripple through a long life. Think of that, dearest."

"I think that in such a case I should more than ever wish to be your wife. I can only say *yes* to you. I have found myself out since I spoke to you this afternoon. You remember what I said?"

"I remember. You did not then know whether you were sure of yourself. Then there was a possibility of your loving some one else."

"It was scarcely so much as that. But I tried to be sincere with you. I was sincere. Somehow I never could be anything else with you. When I come close to your good, true nature, I am more than ever good and true myself. I believe that, to

be your wife, would be the happiest thing on earth."

"Then you are mine," he said. "Come life, come death, come temporary pain or life-long grief, you are mine. Is it so? Think once more. Tell me honestly, if you fear? I am going to put you to the proof. Tell me if you have a woman's faith in me. Don't deceive yourself. Can you brave the worst, and be loyally my own?"

"I *have* thought. Did I not say that I had found myself out? Can words say more?"

"My dear promised wife!" he said, and heaved a deep sigh. "If I did not believe in my soul that you had done well to prefer me, if I did not feel sure that *my* love is the best you can have, I would not bind you to this broken body of a man. Now listen to me."

She had been kneeling all this time, and he had, with one white weary hand, been touching her hair in a tender, playful way;

and she had stayed still under his fondling.

"Get up," he said. "Help her up, Lady Florence. Stand by her. Listen to me. Both of you listen. Come nearer, my promised wife. Put a hand here, into my hand, while I call Heaven to witness that what I am going to say is true. I call Heaven to witness that when I got into the dusky shadows and the dancing starlight on the bridge—you know where it is, and can imagine how it looked—that I saw Grandison there. I cried out, surprised, 'Oh! you are here.' He answered, 'So you want her, do you, *do* you?' in a voice so changed and roughened by emotion, by bitter anger, that I hardly knew it for his own. I looked at him again. There he stood. He had got his fur Canadian cloak on. We had been looking at it in the hall. The light resting on the ground showed his trousers turned up round the ankles, about which Mr. Naylor had been laughing before we started. I had not kept with the others.

Knowing the ground, I had gone round by the pines, and through the beech-tree grove, down to the little bridge. He kept in shadow. He said, 'You will never have her,' and he flung himself upon me. We had an awful contest. It was on my side for my life. He tried to force me back over the bridge into the water. I knew I was fighting for my life. We closed upon each other like madmen. He was greatly encumbered by the cloak, but it protected him, too. He is a quicker man than I am, though we were, in strength, an equal match. I had got my hand on the collar of the cloak, and I clung to him. Then, by a great effort, he threw me over, and as I fell this piece"—he opened his left hand, which had, till this moment, been closely shut on what it held—"this piece of the collar of the cloak was torn away, and I kept it tightly."

He showed the piece, with a few inches of fur on it, and, strangely enough, part of

Captain Grandison's name, which had been stamped on fine canvas, and firmly stitched inside.

"Go on," gasped Marian.

"I never lost my senses. I knew I was badly hurt. When they found me, they wondered over my torn coat and my bruised and wounded limbs. I said that I had struggled—as I had done truly—over the low bushes and among the rocks. Now, Marian, tell me—listen. I give you back my promise—I may die; by the great effort this requires, I know that I am dangerously injured." He heaved a great trembling sigh. "I give you back your promise. If you like to take it back, take it now."

All the time that he was speaking he was holding the bit of Captain Grandison's cloak in his hand. Marian left Lady Florence's arm, and once more knelt down by Mr. Bellingsby's side. She could not speak; yet she was not weeping. When she did speak, she said, "Would you break my

heart?" Her face at that moment seemed to tell more than her words. There was a humble, sorrowful worship in her eyes. "Oh!" she said, "would you break my heart? How could I bear such a sorrow without your help?"

The words struck the listening Lady Florence as strange words, as if the sorrow about Captain Grandison was more than equal in strength and intensity to the love she bore Mr. Bellingsby. Was that what he was to be to her?—a help to bear the grief that Charley Grandison had made. But Lady Florence said nothing—she only wondered how Alfred would answer her. His answer was of the most unsuspecting sort.

"You are mine, then—mine over again—mine once more."

"Yours," she said, and kissed humbly the hand she held.

Now he gathered up all his strength, speaking with a strong effort, and faster than before.

"Very well. Take this." He gave her the thing he held. "Keep it for me. If I die it is yours. I should advise you to destroy it then. If I live, we can consult together. Now go. I hear the doctors, and I have done enough."

He fell back wearily on his pillows, and Lady Florence took Marian from the room.

When Marian got to Lady Florence's room she wept violently, holding fast the evidence that had been given to her keeping. Lady Florence never disturbed her. She was extremely calm, and for one terrible hour scarcely a word passed between them. At last there came a knock at the door, and Lady Florence, on opening it, saw Dr. Perran.

"Alfred wished me to see Miss Harcourt," he said. And then he sat down with them at the table near the fire, and went on: "He is a good man, a great favourite of mine; but as to his injuries, they are bad and painful. We can scarcely make sure of

what the internal injuries may amount to for a few hours. External ones may produce abscess; and under such things the strongest men have died. I am going to write to his mother. Our practice is more among blows and injuries than is generally the case. The sailors and miners give us plenty of experience. The surgeon below—he is with Lady Glaucott—has not set as many bones as I have, nor seen as many men recover. Alfred has a famous constitution. Mr. Rime thinks he will die—I don't. But under what conditions he may have to support life, only time can show."

"How much time?" asked Marian.

"I shall give an opinion in less than a week," said Dr. Perran. "I must write now to Angersteins, and to my mother."

The dreary hours of night and day passed, and passed again. Alfred Bellingsby was very ill. Dr. Perran was silent, and every thought seemed occupied by the case. He had gone to the bridge where

the accident had occurred. Everybody who could walk seemed to have gone there. Then the snow came down in earnest, and covered up the earth, and bowed down the trees, and made a darkness in the house for two days. The change in the atmosphere seemed to hurt Alfred. They began to talk of lumber abscess, of almost unheard-of pain, of the great weakness caused by the agony he had already gone through.

Almost all Lady Glaucott's guests were gone—only Mr. Garret Naylor and Mary, Lady Florence and Marian remained, with Dr. Perran, who allowed no calls from Portspadron to draw him from Mr. Bellingsby's side. One morning Mr. Rime came to Lady Glaucott, after his usual daily visit to Alfred was over, and he told her that he would undertake to remove Mr. Bellingsby to his own house.

"To Danesford Hall?" she said.

"Yes. We could do it without any special evil consequences."

Lady Glaucott stared at him.

"Remove him!—why?"

"I have grave doubts as to his recovery. We do not know what may happen. The distance is not great. We should have a carriage on purpose, and place him on a water-bed. We both feel sure that, at this moment, he might be moved. And we intend to propose it to-day."

"In other words," said Lady Glaucott, who, with all her constitutional shyness, could be brave in the hour of need, "you are of opinion that he will die, and you would take him to die in his own house."

Mr. Rime bowed his head.

"Things follow, you must remember," he said—"funerals."

"He can be buried with his ancestors if he pleases—that may be respectable; but I doubt if he will wish to make his grave *there*. But if he is to die, he shall die here. Has he asked to go?"

"No. But our duty to you——"

"Oh, thank you! But if ever you visit me in my western home, you will know how we cling together. We can't part with Mr. Bellingsby. We must have, for him, the sense of home, I am sure. Our names are Portspadron names; our voices, the voices of home. He would die certainly, if he were to lose such comforting influences. Does he know that an hour of danger is coming? I will send for his mother."

"He knows," said Mr. Rime. "Or he suspects. He has sent for Mr. Garret Naylor; and he is now making his will. He asked me to stay, in order to be one of the witnesses."

Mrs. Garret Naylor came in. "Am I in the way?"

"Oh no; I have just heard how your husband is engaged."

"Yes. It makes me shiver;" and she shrugged her shoulders. I should be so unhappy, if I could believe that Alfred might die. But I can't. I have tried to

imagine it, and I can't." She shivered again. "It won't reach my mind; and it stays with my body. I shall have influenza if the accounts of him are not better to-morrow. He is such an honest man; so little self-conscious; so heart-whole. In himself he is so healthy a creature. Of course, he won't die, as another man might." And she wrapped a shawl round her, as she sat down near the fire. "I have been with Marian," she said, after a little pause. "I am very glad that I paid that first visit to Portspadron, before I was married. I could never otherwise have understood the way in which everyone lived—so mixed up together; so ready for each other's good. Even now nothing refreshes me more than a visit to Trevarna."

Just then Mr. Garret Naylor came in, and Mr. Rime said, "Good morning," and went to take a look at Alfred, before going away. Then Dr. Perran came, and asked Lady Glaucott to accompany Mr. Naylor

and himself to Alfred's room. They were to sign his will.

It was done; Mr. Garret Naylor looking on with such an inexpressive face that Mr. Rime felt vexed. A great property, greater every day for the coal that had been found since Mr. Bellingsby came into possession, was being left to somebody, and no one could guess to whom.

"This is my act and deed. I am glad to have had time and strength enough given to me to do this," said Alfred. "Thank you."

And so he leaned back against the supports that had been placed for him, and shut his eyes.

Mr. Naylor took the will, refusing blotting-paper with a most professional smile, and airing the signatures carefully till they were perfectly dry. Then he went upstairs, having sent to say to Lady Florence that he had a message for her and Miss Harcourt. Once more they gave an audience in Lady

Florence's dressing-room, which had become her sitting-room generally, till the luncheon hour.

He stood by the fire with the will in his hand.

"I am to say that Mr. Bellingsby has made in this document provision for realizing his property—property of every kind; and he has divided it equally between you, Miss Harcourt, and my wife, making an arrangement for the payment during her life of four hundred a year to his mother. That is the substance of the will. And he desired me to make it known to you. I should say—the management of the property having been carried on under my direction—that you would each have a probable income of two thousand a year, without calculating realizations from the coal—which will not cease to benefit you, if Mr. Bellingsby should die. But we do not intend him to die; and my wife, whose prophecies have hitherto invariably come

true, says he will live. In which case we shall have something pleasanter to congratulate ourselves upon," said Mr. Garret Naylor.

No one spoke.

"The sun comes in pleasantly here. No snow can stand this sudden sunshine very long. The quicker it melts the better, for a thaw is a dreary thing."

Then Mr. Naylor and Lady Florence left the room, and Marian, being alone, took out of a small box, which she kept carefully locked, the piece of Charley Grandison's cloak, and a closely-written sheet of paper. The paper contained Mr. Bellingsby's story, written at intervals during the past few days. The great secret still remained with her and Lady Florence. What Marian felt, no one fully knew. She seldom spoke; but when she did, it was to say that she could not believe that he would die. She kept those dreadful witnesses as to what had occurred on that sad night, and

telling the cause of Alfred's injuries, safe from every eye but her own.

But something was changing Marian. Her generally soft eyes were bright and almost fiercely shining, and there was pain in her quick way of speaking, and in her positive voice. Everybody knew that she was suffering, but exactly what colour that suffering took not even Lady Florence knew. The fact of her engagement to Alfred had not come out, and not an observation had been made about his will. But yet, very soon, she took her place unquestioned by his bedside, like a sister, if not like a wife.

CHAPTER VI.

CHANGES.

The sea of Fortune doth not ever flow;
She draws her favours to the lowest ebb;
Her tides have equal times to come and go;
Her loom doth weave the fine and coarsest web.
R. SOUTHWELL.

THE hour of bitterest pain was over, and the fear that belonged to it. But soon another fear arose—the fear that weakness suggested—an extremity of weakness. Mr. Bellingsby's strength failed rapidly.

"He must have stimulants steadily," said Mr. Rime.

"Send for his mother," said Dr. Perran. "You, Miss Harcourt," he said, "are early called to a sublime office—to alleviate such

griefs as it is beyond human skill to cure."

"I never lose hope," she said. "I have the firmest conviction that—at least just now—Mr. Bellingsby cannot be going to die."

"We shall all know the truth before long," he answered.

Marian and Mrs. Naylor took their turns by the sick man's side. Whenever Marian was allowed to be with him alone, she was there, night or day; whenever he wanted her, she was by his side, with her quiet, gentle, graceful ways, and her indescribable beauty, which seemed to grow more perfect, with an intensity of feeling resting upon it, which it was most affecting to observe.

"You know he is only weak," said Mr. Rime—"only weak *now*."

"*Only* weak," Marian repeated; but there was a tone of despair about the words when she uttered them which deprived them of all comfort.

A great stillness fell on the life at the Towers, as if all had given up their own interests, and had merged their lives in that life which was wearing away in the room where Captain Grandison's cloak had hung, and from which Alfred Bellingsby had never been moved.

Mr. and Mrs. Garret Naylor were still Lady Glaucott's guests. Mrs. Angerstein had been constantly written to, and now she was expected herself. Mrs. Harcourt had written several times to her daughter. In the midst of her happiness in Lizzie's perfect house, she followed Marian's life, always with the hope, more or less plainly expressed, that she would be soon engaged to be married.

Marian used both to laugh and cry over these letters. Her mother quite paraded her wisdom in this matter, always stating the case on general grounds as that which would now be best for everybody, and often saying that there might be a good deal of

trouble, *if she died*, which Marian might not foresee.

"*Your* living with Lizzie would be a different thing from *my* living with her," Mrs. Harcourt would write. And then would come a little apology for such plain-speaking. "You must forgive me, dear Marian, but I plead yourself as my excuse. I think I have perceived in you some dislike, or at least independence, of matrimony. That is not a praiseworthy state of mind. The common way is the safest way, especially for women."

Sometimes Marian let Lady Florence read her mother's letters. To herself that lady would declare that such letters were intolerable. Such a mother would drive anyone to despair, she thought. But she said very little to Marian, and only tried to be a comfort to her. To be wise and foreseeing never occurred to Lady Florence. It was her mission to be a consoler, and Marian blessed her every day for the unspoken

comfort that she contrived to show. But one day a letter came from Mrs. Harcourt which surprised more than Marian. She had begun by lamenting over Mr. Bellingsby's state, who had just then been lying in the very crisis of his illness. It was sad, and strange, too, she said; and she had been upset by the arrival of Charley Grandison, who had always been very fond of her, and indeed of all of them; and if Marian had had money, perhaps she might have had him for a son. It had often occurred to her as a possibility before they left the Groves. But to return to Charley, he was, as he was too often, in such a dreadful hurry. Everybody was in a hurry about it. And he had left his regiment, which was so sure of being a good long time at home now, and he had exchanged into a regiment on the point of going to India.

"If everybody goes we shall be so dull," wrote Mrs. Harcourt.

Marian leaned her head on the table, and

wept passionate tears. She could not speak. All she felt was that he had fled—gone again to India, never waiting for Sir Thomas's return, which was to be so soon. Gone! Lady Florence made her come with her to walk on the terrace before the house, where the sun was shining brilliantly.

Marian never disputed anything now—she went with Lady Florence, and Lady Glaucott joined them. They took a few turns silently. Their hearts were too full. And each knew the other's thoughts so well, there seemed no need of words. Suddenly Lady Glaucott said dreamily,

"It is so odd—so odd about the cloak."

It was as if for one instant some strong pain had laid hold of Marian, and shaken her from head to foot. She took hold of Lady Florence's hand firmly, waiting for what was to follow.

"Charley Grandison's cloak," said Lady Glaucott. "Didn't you know? I suppose people did not like talking about that which

was a trifle compared with other things."

In a sort of agony of feeling, Marian pressed Lady Florence's hand, but she kept her head bowed down, so that no one could see her face; and she never spoke.

"He telegraphed here to say he had lost it," said Lady Glaucott. "His groom always puts it into the dog-cart, and he vowed and declared that he *had* not, and *could* not have forgotten it that night. One thing only was quite clear, that Charley had not worn it; but then he had worn an unusual quantity of overcoats, as the best way of carrying them. The night was very cold. We have made every kind of inquiry, and we can hear nothing of the cloak. Mr. Naylor says that the last time he saw it he had it in the hall, ready to put on, when he was rolling up his dress trousers, to be out of the way of his boots. I remember their laughing about it. Now they think that it must have been stolen at the station. It could hardly have dropped out of the car-

riage. I am vexed. It has been twice advertised for in the *Times*."

"I am tired," said Marian. "I must go in now."

Lady Glaucott turned towards the house. When they were in the hall she looked at Marian, and said,

"Go and rest. You have been sadly tried."

The tears gathered quickly in Marian's eyes, but she kept them back. She and Lady Florence went upstairs together. Marian sat down by the fire shivering.

"Oh! it looks like depravity. He tries to blind people. I wonder what he has done with the cloak? Oh! poor, wretched Charley! And that his boy's love for me should have brought him in his manhood to such a pass as this!"

Lady Florence was wise enough neither to argue on the matter, nor to overlay the subject with any observations either of wisdom or morals. She let it all go. But soon Marian rose up and said,

"It is such a blessing to keep you with me. The secret would break me to pieces if I had to keep it alone."

The next event occurred a few days after. Lady Glaucott appeared with her eyes red, her lips quivering, and she greeted Marian with even more than common tenderness.

"He is gone," she said. "Charley is gone. He sailed yesterday. And the regiment has another five years to stay."

There was nothing to say in the hope of reconciling Lady Glaucott. Those who knew why he was gone were those who could not speak of him.

"And he was so sorry about Mr. Bellingsby," she went on. "He told your mother to write to me, dear Marian, when he was really gone. I have just had her note. Read it, if you please. She says that she never saw a man in such a state as he was when she told him that Mr. Bellingsby might die. But he was very fond of old friends—dear Charley!" says Lady Glaucott,

weeping. "But he never seems to have told your mother about the loss of the cloak. That is odd, for he has written me several notes, and he seemed to have got into a way of always mentioning it."

The house was getting intensely sad. Mr. Bellingsby just lived—no more. They all went to bed in dread, and rose in fear. Whispers were everywhere. The full-toned human voice, for very awe, was hushed. And just at this hour Mrs. Angerstein ar-arrived. Her motherly presence was an acknowledged blessing. There was something inexpressibly grand in her entrance into that luxurious house, in her plain black garments, and wearing a grave, peaceful countenance. She stood, an exquisite picture of mingled power and patience, in the ruby light of the red-curtained hall, and asked for her son.

"Perhaps he should be prepared for seeing you," said Mr. Rime; but Mrs. Angerstein, turning on him her violet eyes, said,

"No, sir. I am his mother."

Then she went forward with a few quick steps, and met Dr. Perran.

"Come," he said—"come. He heard you arrive."

They went together to the room, and she stood over him for a moment silently, while he turned his head aside with a weak, sad smile. Marian was there. She rose from her chair, and Mrs. Angerstein, holding her arms open, took the girl to her breast, and kissed the dark hair that fell upon her neck.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Angerstein. "You and I, my dear, will bring back this man to health and strength, if the Giver of All be willing. There is no death in his face. I can see life, and many years. We will go home, my son. We will get to the healing airs of the salt sea. We will stay still for a while in this life's way, and let Time pass by. But we will rise and overtake him as soon as we can."

Alfred must have felt his mother's pres-

ence as a great strength. It is certain that he began to revive from the date of her seeing him. He had always obeyed her, and now that she said he was to live, it seemed evident that he would do her bidding. She took perfect care of him. Everyone in the house was her servant. All who saw her praised her, and had never done repeating their admiration.

But Mrs. Angerstein had come there for one purpose only, and that purpose she was certainly destined to fulfil. She had come to take Alfred home; and before their medical friend had thought it possible, she said that her son was fit to go; and they could do no other than agree with her.

She made all needful arrangements, with Dr. Perran's help. She employed Mr. Naylor to transact all business matters, in a liberal and proper manner. She thanked them—like a mother; and she fixed the day when they would be gone.

Alfred was not to leave his room—scarce-

ly his bed. She had procured a carriage fitted for an invalid, and she was careful not to exhaust his strength by intercourse with his friends.

He obeyed her like one who had given up life into her hands; and when, one day, Marian asked him if she might show the written paper he had given her to Mrs. Angerstein, he said,

"Yes, of course,—yes, Marian; we will never have a secret from her; and we shall never do ill in any case of difficulty if we abide by her decision."

"Abide by her decision," repeated Marian.

"Yes, I should never wish to do otherwise."

"Abide by her decision." She murmured the words over again as she went away.

It was on that very day, when they had all left the drawing-room, and after Alfred had been made comfortable for the night, that Marian gave the paper to Mrs. Angerstein, saying nothing, but with her eyes

streaming with tears. Mrs. Angerstein left the room to read it, and remained away some time. But a knock came to Lady Florence's door at last, and Marian opened it. Mrs. Angerstein walked in with the box which had contained Mr. Bellingsby's narrative, and the piece of the Canadian cloak.

"Have you anything to say about this, my love?" she asked, in a peculiarly gentle way. "You look as if you had something to say. There has been time enough for thought and action. Captain Grandison is gone; his actions are always of quick performance, and your thoughts—what are they? *We* certainly should have no secrets. Speak as my Patty would have spoken—try to trust me, dear."

Many changes of expression had passed across Marian's face, and Mrs. Angerstein had seemed to be answering them. But when Marian spoke she surprised Lady Florence, who had not read her thoughts in

her face as plainly, perhaps, as the other had done.

"You know your son," said Marian, "and I am now promised to him as his wife. I admire him more than ever I did—I revere him! but——" (Lady Florence looked up in undisguised surprise. But! What had the girl to say that she could so begin?) "But," said Marian, "is it well for a wife to hold an opinion contrary to that of her husband on a matter so important as that which you hold in your hand? Is he—you know him best—is he a man who could bear his wife to believe *always*, and without the shadow of a doubt, that an account written by him, with death and judgment before his eyes, contained only what he *believed* to be the truth, but which the All-seeing Eye of the Father Who is in Heaven knows to be *not* the truth? I cannot believe that Charles Grandison laid his hands on Alfred. Once he said to me, 'Trust me—trust me, Marian.' I *have*

trusted him—I *do* trust him. I trust him as a brave soldier and as a good man; as one who would never, under any excitement, lift an assassin's hand against another. I know that Alfred has a right to his belief. He has proof enough. There was a motive, too, for I had said *no* to Charles Grandison, and I had decided to marry Alfred. I preferred Alfred—remember that. I knew that his character best suited mine. I gladly thought of marriage with him. Charles was jealous, angry, with a strong sense of ill-usage, which he was not careful to conceal. He was at enmity with Alfred. I am not saying anything to be construed into blame of Alfred. He has all the evidence of truth on his side; but I have faith, and I can never—no, *never*—believe that Charley Grandison lifted his hand against your son. Now, am I to marry him? I love him—I have no desire ever to marry anyone else; but for ever—through that for ever which must make up our life in this world—I shall,

contrary to all proof, believe that Charley is innocent; and yet Alfred will carry to his grave the marks which make him certain of his guilt. You know your son—can he bear the trial that may arise out of that? You must decide."

Mrs. Angerstein had been steadily observing Marian. Her own face showed great emotion; but she answered her with a steady voice.

"No woman," she said, "should marry a man with that great difference planted in their hearts. Leave it to me."

Then Marian fell on Mrs. Angerstein's neck, sobbing.

"It is a hard lot," she whispered, between her gasping sorrow; "but it would be harder to marry so good a man, and *not* give him every thought of my heart."

"I am sorry for the trouble—more sorry than I may say—more than it might be good for you to know." Her voice shook. It was evidently a hard trial to part with

Marian. "But this trouble, like others, must be borne. It will be best for you not to see Alfred again. Keep to your room to-morrow. We shall go early. Don't forget me. Good-bye."

And now Mrs. Angerstein restrained herself no longer. It was almost more than Lady Florence could bear to see them in each other's arms. But Marian had one more last word.

"Look at his will," she said. "He must change that. Get it done at once. I have no place there now."

Mrs. Angerstein, as she was going away, turned round, and stood still for a moment, looking at Marian, and then at Lady Florence.

"If," she said, in a clear voice, full of determination—"if a man strikes another in his grief, and, maddened into anger, returns and gives blow on blow, till a deadly contest ends in the possible death of one of them—if *he*—he, the injured one, can *for-*

give, as Alfred forgives, why should not those who love him *forget?* He has to forgive, and he has forgiven; he has done more—he accuses himself of answering passion, of the excitement of great rage accompanying his self-defence. He has told me everything. Can you not, on your side, keep your judgment inactive? You are not obliged to do anything, nor to say anything, but a woman can respect her husband's judgment. My son is the only one who, in this matter, has any evidence to offer, and he has all the evidence that is required to satisfy his judgment. Respect that judgment. It can't be a hard thing for a wife to do—a wife who loves her husband."

"I should, as his wife, give him all the love he could require. It is not a question of love—it is a question of ceasing to have trust in a long-loved friend. I can't give up faith in Captain Grandison. No doubt to say and feel this is contrary to reason and common sense. Heaven knows it is

against my interest! But the fact remains —that great difference exists between Alfred and me. Am I fit to be his wife?"

"And you can't give up to him?"

"I can't."

"And you won't try to bring your judgment into conformity with his judgment?"

"I will never try."

She was quite pale, and very tranquil. Her courage had reached the point of desperation; her friendship was more perfect than her love. And this Mrs. Angerstein saw, but most unwillingly.

"Leave it to me," she said again. "His great heart would break. He would be a slave to you, but not a husband. You had better not try to see him again. Leave it to me."

Once more she took the girl in her arms, like a mother; but Lady Florence was sure that she could detect a glad expression, as of intense satisfaction, in the soft sweet eyes which were still bright with unshed

tears. What could Mrs. Angerstein be feeling? Was this woman, who seemed to be so guileless, glad to get her son back, as all her own, once more? Was she rejoicing at the separation from Marian? It was a mysterious moment. But when Mrs. Angerstein once more bade Marian "good-bye," there was a tenderness in her glance that was full of approval, mixed, Lady Florence thought, with a promise of better times. But that night it was sad to see Marian.

"Do I love two men at one time?" she asked, with a dismal smile. "I can't take one, because I can't give up the other. Give up Charley!—think such evil of Charley! I would rather earn my bread, rather starve, rather die!"

The time that had passed while the events which had been narrated occurred had taken them through December. January had come now, a new year had dawned, after a tearful Christmas. What would be

in it? Would the coming weeks and months bring a cure for the grief that had made Christmas a silent time with the fear of death upon them in that hushed house of solemn waiting? Who could tell?

Marian's heart was full of questions. But she gravely took herself to task, and stopped its wonderings. "Let me learn submission. There is a strength for every trial." Such were her thoughts; and time after time, when the waters of desolation flowed over her heart, as they went back again, they left her still strong in her truth.

CHAPTER VII.

A SILENT WORLD.

Small griefs have tongues; full casks have ever found
To give, if any, yet but little sound.

HERRICK.

WITH a wan face and a shivering body, wrapped in a shawl, because the fire preferred smoke to flame, and wore a black aspect when its brightest efforts would have been nothing less than a blessing, close to the frost-feathered window panes stood Marian, watching from her room-window the departure of Mrs. Angerstein and her son. Marian felt as if her heart was breaking; she felt frightened at the violence of her emotion; she had not known till now that

she could suffer in so sad a way. In all those griefs which, up to the present moment had beset her path, she had had to act, she had been the brave worker, the burden-bearer, and, for others, the conqueror of life. But now she was called to the bitter trial of renunciation. She had done the only thing that she was able to do; what had been done she could not regret. If she were to die of doing it, she should never repent of what she had done. But there was a cold, forlorn, desolate feeling that she had done much from a helpless sense of being obliged to do it—obliged by the tyranny of a sentiment that had its roots in the past—a past which influenced her as it influenced no one else.

An unutterable loneliness seemed to wrap her round, and chill her to the heart. What had happened had had the effect of separating her from everybody. Oh! why had Charley Grandison fled, and left her to suffer,—suffer alone, and for him?

She saw through the frosted panes how they got Alfred into the carriage. She saw his mother enter it with him, and Dr. Perran. She saw all the luggage placed on another carriage, and follow with the man-servant. Every detail her eye took in, while her sore heart was aching because she was *there* —left alone in the world; and through her own will, which must be satisfied, no matter how much the body suffered which that will inhabited. And where was her reward? It is an act above nature to suffer for no end. She looked into her life, and saw nothing but desolation.

She still stood shivering, with red eyes watching the carriages as they passed away out of sight. They were gone. She had lost the last glimpse of them, as the trees shut them out from view, and with them was gone all the hope out of her life. There was nothing to look forward to. All had failed her. And why? Because, to both of these men, in their characters of friend

and husband, she had been *true*. She had trusted her friend. Those long-ago words, "Trust me, Marian, trust me!" had found a meaning now which she had never supposed could belong to them. No double-dealing could exist with the purity of heart with which they had been met and remembered. And that same heart, in its straightforward faith, had refused to benefit by the love and the riches with which Alfred desired to endow her; for she could not deceive him. Yet she might have kept silence. She need not have disputed his belief with him. She could have loved and served him, and been happy and independent, have done good and enjoyed life, just by keeping silence. But no, she must be true. Truth is a woman's strength; a good woman's great necessity. By saying boldly that on one subject they must for ever differ, she had saved her truth, and lost the fair prospect of an abundantly happy life. It could not but weigh upon her grievously, yet not with the

grief that accompanies regret. She never repented.

They were gone. That sweet, good life was gone too. But, though she stood lonely, she stood without blame, with no shadow on her true pure-heartedness. A woman who, above all things, in the faith of a woman, loved justice—so loved it as not even by implication to unite herself with that which might be injustice; so trusted as to sacrifice all things to her faith.

Everything passed plainly in review before Marian, as she stood there looking out on a world where, in the silence, "the naked twigs were shivering all for cold." She shivered too, and not the body only, but the heart, for she knew that the burden of silence must be laid upon her. Her grief was a thing which could not be worn away by words, nor its sorrow lessened by explanations. She tried to think of the future that was at hand—that would come quickest to her; but she shrank away from

the task. The evil of the hour was enough for that hour. Another hour might help her to some decision. Must it be Trowberry Terrace, with her mother, disappointed and anxious,—a mother no longer uncomplaining,—must it be that?

Marian loved her mother, and was very sorry for her. "Anyhow, *she* must be happy. I can't see any distance now. But I shall see further soon. Her happiness will be mine. I shall see what is best before long."

So she quieted her asking, fearing, sorrow-suggesting heart, and opened the door for Lady Florence's maid, who came with pleasant messages—and could she speak to Mrs. Garret Naylor for a few minutes somewhere before luncheon, as she wished to ask her something before the post went out?"

Mrs. Garret Naylor was one of those happily-placed persons whose lives suit them, who delight in their husbands, and are able to live in their pursuits. In her way, which

was a perfectly womanly way, she identified herself with law and government, Parliament and the people—she was her husband's wife. They had two children; and Mary was an excellent mother. Mr. Garret Naylor was a great admirer of his boy and girl; but he was curiously ignorant of every nursery detail. He had been exempt from every grief, and saved from all perplexity. They had cut their teeth without tears, he would have said; and gone through all other ills to which human flesh falls heir very early in life, without complaining. But that was only what Mr. Garret Naylor imagined. He was kept in happy ignorance; and after having spoken more than once in the House on some great occasion, and left his name on the pages of history, as everybody declared, he discovered that his children had had the whooping-cough, and that Mary had gone every other day to Brighton to look after them. But their house had been kept quiet, and the papers had report-

ed the most powerful speech of the day. When Mr. Garret Naylor, in the pleasantness of success had said, "Where are Edgar and Mary, my love?" she answered, "Oh! they will be home to-morrow;" and then the explanation came with a laugh. She was an excellent wife, and in her heart she worshipped her husband all day long. She exercised in her own life a great independence, which was just the very thing for a rising man. She had all that was necessary for this independent life—strong sense, plenty of courage, considerable means; and, above all, that worshipping love which caused every action of her life to be done for Mr. Garret Naylor's sake. Then also she had the encouraging reward of being thoroughly appreciated. No man ever trusted a wife more than Mr. Garret Naylor trusted his. He was very proud of her, and very much obliged to her. But there are people in the world who would have been surprised if they could have known how

few were the words, on matters of business, that ever passed between them.

When Alfred Bellingsby's will was made, and signed, Mr. Garret Naylor, at Alfred's request, had told both his wife and Marian of the manner in which he had disposed of his property. Mr. Garret Naylor, as his wife read the outspread paper, had said, putting his finger on Marian's name, "You see?" And she had answered, "Yes." And they had never said any more about it. But it had revealed—at least to Mary—how matters stood between her cousin and her friend. She was not a woman who asked many questions, ever; and in this case she asked none; neither did she make any observations. She saw what had been written, and she knew that he would marry if he lived, and that that will would be waste paper—only, he surely loved Marian. Acting on that idea, she took in Marian's future, before that great end could be attained, at a single glance, and she asked to

speak to her. When they met it was with affection—just an indescribable *something* was in their manner—a something more than usual; and Mary began to speak in that gentle, earnest way which was usual to her when she had anything really at heart.

"I want to ask a favour of you," she said. "We go back to town to-morrow. Lady Florence returns in a day or two afterwards. I think she only waits to get news from Portspadron."

"That is all. Lady Glaucott will hear from Mrs. Angerstein. Dr. Perran has promised to write also, I know."

"When you return to London, come to me—do, Marian, I beseech you. Come for a month."

"A month!"

"Yes, only come, and we will go together to see Lizzie the day after you arrive, if you please, and then you can settle everything with Mrs. Harcourt. Come straight to us. I will meet you at the railway

station. Come to us, dear Marian—*do!*"

"I should like it, and, to be quite honest, Mary, it would suit me. I should have time to think, and to arrange."

"I know it, dear. So you are coming? Thank you—I am so much obliged."

"But I must speak to Lady Florence first."

"Of course; but she has Lady Brank-some at home, and she can't want you so much as I do."

And thus, in this manner, Marian's next step in life was fixed. In her silent soul she was glad. She should have a season of rest, and she should hear about Alfred Bellingsby through his cousin. In this way she thought she should have more accurate tidings than any that might come through Lady Glaucott. And yet she knew that Alfred would never neglect her. She expected that Mrs. Angerstein would write; but she was, for the first time in her life, in a timid state—wondering how she should

stand alone; looking into the future like a child afraid of the darkness, and glad to keep hold of a friend's hand. A friend such as Mrs. Garret Naylor, who belonged to them, was just what Marian wanted, so she took it gladly.

One day Lady Florence came to Marian in her pleasant, caressing sort of way, and she said,

"You have had enough of me for the present. I know too much. With me you could not practise forgetfulness, and you would have a perpetual trial in self-restraint."

Marian looked at her, and felt for the first time how true this was.

"Yes, you are too pleasant. I want bracing air and a meagre diet. You bless me too truly. I shall grow stronger—for I think both mind and body are weak just now—I shall grow stronger away from you. But when I want happiness, I may come and ask for it, I hope?"

"Oh, yes. But it is as I said—I know too much. There is sympathy in the mere knowledge of that fact. Now Mrs. Naylor only supposes, from her knowledge of the will he made, that Mr. Bellingsby loves you. She supposes that, and she is glad to suppose it; she told me so herself."

"Oh! I will one day correct that idea. It is a natural idea, of course, but it is not so."

Lady Florence said no more. She was exceedingly sorry, but she feared that Marian's words were true.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW LIFE.

Keeping with many a light disguise
The secret of self-sacrifice.

WHITTIER.

WITHIN the week they were in London. It had been arranged that Marian should go at once to Mary, so she bade her friend good-bye in the railway-carriage—not the first good-bye that they had said to each other, and, finding Mrs. Naylor's carriage waiting, she went straight to her house.

It was just such a house as anyone would have expected who had known all that Marian knew. It was a handsomely-furnished,

comfortable house. You felt that Mary's house was comfortable at once, and yet it would have required a long study to tell exactly what made it so.

"Not less than a month," said Mary, kissing her—"not less than a month. My dear Marian, how welcome you are! I wish there were no secrets between us."

"Are there any?" asked Marian.

"Yes; Alfred made us co-heiresses of all he possesses, with only an annuity to his mother. Why?"

"Because he loves us better than any other people in the whole known world, and because his mother, who has already more than enough for her wants, would rather be spared the trouble of managing any more property."

"But why you? I am his cousin. I helped him to his rights. Why was *I* not the only one to profit by the will—why did he leave half to *you?*"

"Because he had learnt to love me," said

Marian, boldly. "Not that he will ever love anybody as he loved Patty. He told me so."

"And you will marry him when he is well?"

"No. I told his mother to see that that will was altered. I am not going to be his wife. He ought not to let that will remain. I do not wish it."

"You brave woman!" said Mary. "I am so little romantic, I am so dreadfully practical, that I can scarcely understand you."

"Oh! I don't mind whether people understand or not," said Marian; "and it is not worth while to try, because Alfred is going to live."

"And you won't marry him?"

"I can't, dear Mary. It vexes me; don't talk about it."

"Forgive me, dearest Marian. Have you thought how hard it will be to go back to the old life? I know a good deal *now*. You buried yourselves, and then I knew

nothing. But I know now. Have you thought how hard it will be?"

"It will be impossible—quite impossible. But my mother can live near Lizzie, if not with her; and she can visit Herbert, who, I suppose, will have a parsonage some day; and I will go forth and conquer the earth."

"Really?" said Mary, in a tone of the softest inquiry.

"Yes, really," said Marian, with a smile.

"We are going to have my aunt to spend next week here. I am so glad to get her visit over with you in the house. I love her, and Garret is only just able to bear her. He never relaxes enough to understand her," said Mary, gravely, "and that is such a pity! because she is one of the best people in the world. She thinks out loud, and he supposes her to be giving opinions, when she is only, by a process of her own, trying to discover if she has any opinions or not. I am very glad that you should see her again."

And so, in a few days—which days were given up to Mary's husband and children, and to dinner-parties, which did Marian good, because she had to think and talk, forget herself and please other people—Mrs. Clayford came, and was welcomed, even riotously, by the children, and affectionately by her niece and Marian.

Mrs. Clayford was delighted to see Miss Harcourt again, and she scarcely talked to anyone else for the first few days of her visit.

But, before her arrival, they had had a day at Lizzie's bright home, bright in Winter as in Summer—always gay with happiness, and full of occupation and interest.

"It seems a strange thing," said Lizzie, "but Freddy is making designs for the loveliest Vicarage—and *where?* At Lord Mawley's! The old house is too old—too close to the water—not warm enough—not large enough—not pretty enough. The new one is to be just on an easy height

above the present house. Freddy has been there twice. He likes Herbert's old pupil, and talks charmingly of Lady Mary. They have asked me to come with him the next time. Lady Mawley wrote me such a very pretty note. It is there—read it. And I am going. Mr. Naylor sees Mr. Belville sometimes; and the other day they had a long conversation, and Mr. Belville says that Teresa is ill, and low-spirited. Lady Mawley actually asks in that note if I shall dislike meeting her, after all that has passed; and I said that I should like nothing in the world so much."

"Is it true? Should you like to meet her?"

"Yes, of course. Why should she be miserable? It seems to me such an unhealthy state. If she repents, let her make amends. If she does not repent, let her be happy."

"Of what use would repentance be?"

"Ah! can't you see? I shall make her

like me—I shall have her here. What are Herbert's love affairs to me?"

"But he nearly died," said Marian.

"And now he is well, and coming back the end of May; and everybody must try to get him a curacy in a healthy place. Please to spread that news," said Lizzie. "I have an ambition, and I see my way to its fulfilment. I want to have Teresa here, and make her know herself, for an insignificant idiot, a woman whose intellect, at its full stretch, is scarcely able to comprehend even my dear old father-in-law's scientific talk. It would do her a great deal of good to feel that she is *inferior*. I promise myself that consolation."

Mrs. Naylor laughed.

"If I could only take her to Trevarna, and show her our old aunt's gold lace, old clothes, and beautiful china, and Battersea enamel," she said, "that might complete her education."

"Is she capable of sufficient education,

in a high moral sense, to understand Portspadron?"

Lizzie's question was so gravely put that they all laughed together.

"And who is at Herbert's old home now?" asked Marian.

"A delightful creature—a scholar—nobody understands him. He is Lady Mawley's pet curiosity; he wishes that all the great people of the nation talked French; and was delighted to talk to Frederick, whose style and accent he pronounced perfect. If people still spoke French, as in the days of John of Gaunt, he would be happy. Every step away from that language has been a step into barbarism. I thought it strange to have so many letters with the Mawley post-mark again," said Lizzie.

So they gossiped through the day, with very little interruption from Mrs. Harcourt, beyond the frequent inquiry for her spectacles.

"Oh! you don't know," said Lizzie.

"She has just begun to wear them. They add immensely to dear mother's dignity, and distressingly to her anxieties. She walks miles after her spectacles every day. Freddy is going to get her a chain, and glasses to wear round her neck; and I am going to write a book on the plurality of pockets. But I shall so miss her when you take her away, Marian. *Do* take my plan into consideration. Live here by me, or get married, and give me mother altogether. I do so like admiration; and nobody admires me as much."

It was hard to believe in the midst of hot-house flowers, and the most successful efforts to produce an artificial Spring—amidst mental culture and the youthful enjoyment of so much of the gifts of earth; in a world full of objects of healthy interest; in a life full of work and alive with talent—it was difficult to believe, in the midst of gifts so many and so great, that but a short time since Marian had been so stricken in a

night of which it might be said that its gloom would be, for her, eternal. She returned with Mrs. Garret Naylor, gladdened by the sight of Lizzie's life, and satisfied as to her mother; but with the weighing-down sense of her own desolation more distinctly than ever made known to her. She said nothing. Hers was to be a silent life. She found an unexpected refuge in Mrs. Clayford's talk of little nothings, and in her long arguments over something that had been settled long before.

She sat with the dear, kind, gentle little lady; and she listened, often with a very amused attention, to the things she said.

"My dear Marian, you quite belong to my memory of those exceedingly odd and pleasant days in that remarkable room which had a bow window, you know. And the sea is a fine object. I always knew that. I always felt it to be so, without any dispute, but still it has a strange history. Whether it is a pleasure or a pain I never could quite

make out. It is a very dreadful thing, on the whole, I am inclined to think. But we are not called on to make up our minds on those matters, though we may all dislike treachery, and say so; and, for my part, if a friend goes to sea, I always give him up as dead. It's the safest way. And as to poor Captain Grandison, whose voice did me good, it was so clear and true, even when he did not speak to me—I could cry. But still a great many people who go to India *do* live to come home. So we may hope the best. It was much further off, too, when I was a child."

Marian agrees to all that Mrs. Clayford says, or to all that she means to say, and Mrs. Clayford is evidently getting very fond of her. Mary watched the growing friendship, and did all that was in her power to foster it.

"Marian understands my aunt," she said to her husband.

"I admire Miss Harcourt; and I will ad-

mire her more than ever, 'specially as she gives me the opportunity of more than ever admiring you," says Mr. Garret Naylor, with gallantry.

"But it *is* a good plan?" Mary says, inquiringly.

"Most excellent. Miss Harcourt can be trusted with power, and we should all bless her in the using of it. I am quite in earnest. Your excellent aunt is an anxiety. Get rid of the anxiety, and persuade Miss Harcourt to live in her house, and take charge of everything, as only a gentlewoman can do. Now, my Mary, I must go."

"But how much?" exclaimed Mrs. Naylor, between her husband's loving good-mornings.

"I think less than a hundred a year could not be offered to her. A great deal will be expected, though she won't feel it to be a great deal, because it will be no more to her than a return to the circumstances into which she was born. Your aunt is wealthy.

But she can't take care of herself. You know that, Mary. Somebody will rule her. Let Miss Harcourt take the work, and I could transact business with *her*, you know."

So Mr. Garret Naylor went away, and Mary sought her aunt, who, knowing that all this was to be talked through with Mr. Garret Naylor, was sitting in a very nervous and trembling fashion, waiting for the result.

When she heard the door shut, which told of Mr. Naylor's departure, she applied herself to her aromatic vinegar, and sighed over the fact of her niece being tied through life to so strong-minded a man. She was saying, in her palpitating heart, that she should have died of such strength. "I should have been hopelessly crushed," she was thinking.

And Mr. Naylor, who had left his home with praises in his heart for the woman who reigned there, was thinking, "No wonder Clayford died. It was perhaps the best

thing he could do. Too good to scold, and too incomprehensible to listen to. What a woman! And one of the best little creatures in all the world. I wonder how much of my dear wife's vigour of mind is owing to that woman's complicated character. How Mrs. Clayford can hang on upon a thing! She was determined to have Miss Harcourt when Lizzie married, and she has got her. All things come to those who wait. She would have given the idea up, and got some one else, if she had had any sense. But she hadn't, and she succeeds. Of what use is wisdom?"

Thus meditating, Mr. Garret Naylor pursued his way, and his wife found the lady of whom he had been thinking, and said, with a bright face,

"He thinks it quite a perfect plan. He always did that, only it was impossible."

"But I never saw that."

"No, you never did; but now, what will Marian say?"

"I could not speak to her," said Mrs. Clayford. "I must leave that to you. You are so good a manager, dear. I can trust you."

And so Mary went in search of her friend. The story was soon told. Mary summed it up thus—

"You must be a daughter, with an allowance of a hundred a year. You will have to take great care of the additional and adopted mother. When she is left to herself, she has not made up her mind where and when she will drive on Tuesday morning until it is Wednesday night."

"It is a great thought. Thank you," said Marian. "But you must let me think about it."

"Shall we send for Lizzie and your mother? Would you like to consult them about it?"

"No, thank you; my life has never had any consultation in it. I should not know how to begin; but I believe that I

might possibly like to see Mrs. Grigshaw."

Mary laughed.

"You shall see whoever you please, but you must accept my dear aunt for your present work. Having got on so far with the negotiation, I could not bear to have you refuse. You can go to Mrs. Grigshaw after luncheon, when we drive out."

"I will go in a cab, alone," said Marian.

By the next day everything was settled, and every detail arranged. Marian had seen Mrs. Grigshaw, and everything at Trowberry Terrace was to stay in its usual state.

"It will be a home for Herbert when he comes, and prevent my mother being so entirely dependent on Mr. Naylor for a home. She and I can pay the rent between us. Besides, I may want to come here sometimes."

Then she saw her mother, and Mrs. Harcourt heard of her daughter's plans with general approval, but not without some vexation.

"Charley told me you were to marry Mr. Bellingsby," she said, half crying.

"Charley is a terrible gossip," said Marian.

"And, if he had not thought that, I do believe that he would have asked you himself. He would never have gone to India in that hurry, if he had not thought that you were promised; and I must say that you behaved rather oddly to me, Marian."

"But I am not promised," said Marian.

"Well, you never saw anyone so odd as poor dear Charley Grandison was. I ought to understand him, when he used to be almost like another child in our house, but I did not understand him at all; and I hope you have not behaved ill to him. And now you have reduced yourself to *this*."

So Mrs. Harcourt wiped her eyes. But she was a woman who had always had a steady eye on possibilities. Few people had ever watched life more earnestly, and Mrs. Harcourt had never committed any extrava-

gance or folly in all her life. She knew that Marian was doing the right thing, and she was very glad; but she did not disdain the luxury of a grievance. She liked airing the Charley Grandison grievance very much, and she did it with a gentle affectation of injury that was exceedingly imposing. Marian put it all down with a strong hand.

"Don't imagine things which have no existence," she said. "You might injure me. I am going to Mrs. Clayford happily, and with a thankful spirit, not as a castaway."

"A castaway! What can you mean?"

"Are you not suggesting that Alfred Bellingsby would not have me—that I played for that which I did not get?"

"How dreadful! Do you think that I—your mother——"

"No; I do not think that *you* would injure me. But I want you never to say anything that would make other people gossip; there is nothing to wonder about." On which

Marian kissed her mother, and began to talk of Trowberry Terrace. "It will make you properly independent to keep our rooms. I, too, may want them. Herbert will be coming back, and you must be there then, and make a home for him. And I shall pay twenty pounds a year towards the rent."

"And even Lizzie might like to be there sometimes; and Frederick, though he has his club, would feel it pleasant to have a room if he chose to sleep in London. Mrs. Grigshaw will keep the beds aired, I am sure," said Mrs. Harcourt.

CHAPTER IX.

A REST IN LIFE.

There flies a bird to a neighbouring tree,
But very lazily flieth he;
And he sits and twitters a gentle note,
That scarcely ruffles his little throat.

MRS. GILMAN.

MRS. CLAYFORD'S house was a perfect possession. Mr. Garret Naylor had bought it for her in that new London which had been gardens and fields not long before. A house just big enough, a garden with two trees and plenty of shrubs; a coach-house, stables, and servants' dwellings sufficiently near. Everything was perfect except the head and hand to guide it all; and Marian brought those requisites, with

such thanks from Mr. Garret Naylor as made her more merry than grateful.

"How you exaggerate!" she said. "Mrs. Clayford only thinks out loud. I like it!"

"Oh! bless us all!" And he took Marian's hand kindly, and said, "Take this in advance—first quarter, you know. What a blessing it is to find a business-like woman, who does not blush about money, as if it were a sin. They remind me of that delightful true story of the fine lady who was reduced to sell muffins. She went out into the street, saying, 'Muffins to sell! Muffins to sell! Oh! I hope nobody hears me!'"

Marian took the five-and-twenty pounds, and said,

"I must give you a receipt. Keep a book for me."

"A good plan! Now arrange everything, and rule the little establishment firmly. A firm hand on the lives we are supposed to guide is a most necessary thing. So look after the maids. Send the men to

me, if you please. Women-servants ought to be the happiest people in creation. Existence has no cares for them. They make beds, and answer bells; the first as fast, the last as slowly, as they please. Then they are housed, fed, and paid for it."

So Marian was established in the prettiest house in Hilborough Gardens, and Mrs. Clayford was supremely pleased.

Before a month was passed, Marian wondered over the ease and speed with which she had dropped into a life of luxurious peace.

Mrs. Clayford had cards printed, with her name and Miss Harcourt's upon them; and she sent out invitations to the most charmingly-contrived parties—so charming that they soon became greatly-considered parties in their small world. For they lived in a world within a world, and made a good life of it; sowing blessings broadcast round them, according to Mrs. Clay-

ford's own idea that too much prying was impertinent.

"I don't the least dislike being cheated, my dear," she would say to Marian. "I have large means, and considering what a poor creature I have always been, quite unable to cope with the world I live in, all that considered, I am surely a cheat myself. It is a fellow-feeling—what does it make us?—wondrous kind, surely somebody said, and very sensibly said, too, if we leave a large margin; and I don't approve of charitable wills—give away *now*—*now* is always a good time; and it saves a great deal of thinking."

Happily for Marian, Mrs. Clayford got on excellently with Mrs. Harcourt. She had always admired her; and in the old days at Portspadron, she had admired the General. She would talk of this to Mrs. Harcourt in a way that no one else had ever ventured to do. But Mrs. Harcourt liked it. And when she came to them, it soon became evident

that she expected it. Very strange talk it was sometimes, all things mixed up together—the cream-coloured ponies, and the particulars of how the General lost his arm; dear good Amy, and the bow-windowed sitting-room, with talk of Patty's grave, and Rosdew in its lonely state, before Sir Thomas returned, and when the children made of the whole place a happy playground.

"I am very glad to see you here," said Mrs. Harcourt to Marian one day. "You are happily placed. Mrs. Clayford has her peculiarities, but she is an excellent woman."

Marian was always glad to see her mother. She heard from her the last news from Portspadron; for Lady Glaucott wrote to her, and Mrs. Angerstein also. Mrs. Harcourt amused herself at this time of her life with a considerable amount of penmanship. She had drifted into a world of pleasant things—she had, by her visit to Rosdew, renewed her friendships, and made

interests for herself at Portspadron; and she liked to enjoy her pleasures over again by writing of them. But Marian herself was not neglected. Short notes, in stiff, well-formed characters, came from Mrs. Angerstein, and she knew by that means the progress towards recovery that Mr. Bellingsby had made.

"He is coming to see you one day," wrote his mother.

And Marian felt her whole frame thrill under the outspoken words. But it was through her mother, and through her only, that she heard about Charley. And but a few words had come from him. She could not help hungering after more sometimes—wondering, fearing, rather, why he kept so silent. There was an enduring sorrow at her heart—it acted as ballast in her changing life. She could never be over-glad, or excessively sorry, for anything now that existence might bring to her. A wearing memory held her in its heavy chains; she

had submitted her mind to a dark captivity. In the darkness dwelt truth, but she was not able to find it; and her mind remained inactive in the captivity that her trust in Charley Grandison had made for it.

Thus Marian welcomed her life with Mrs. Clayford as the best possible thing that could have befallen her. She had silenced her mother; and Lizzie's life of crystal purity had never been clouded by a doubt about anything. She held her own secret, and she had made her own world. Only to Lady Florence's eyes was the reflection of the dark place in her mind ever visible on the mirror-like countenance of her beautiful face. But they never spoke of it. Some tenderness of tone, or a passing caress, told Marian that her friend remembered it all. A single answering glance said that she thanked her—that was all. Back she went to the very lap of luxury and peace, with Mrs. Clayford's trickling words making a

droll murmuring in the midst of the possession of all earthly things.

Sometimes Mrs. Clayford would cease uttering her fanciful sentences to say,

"Dear Marian, how happy you make me! I have not a care in the world. I am so much obliged to you."

And then Marian would know that she was indeed greatly blessed, and make strong and heartfelt acts of gratitude to the Giver of all Good. Coming down to earth again, however, in a moment, to answer some question of Mrs. Clayford's.

"My love, we don't forget about flannel and mutton broth. Food and clothing are great things. I am ashamed—oh! so terribly ashamed—when people talk of the wickedness of of those who have no home, nor food, nor proper clothing. I want to hide myself. It is a very uncomfortable feeling, my dear, and it has often made me ill. But there are some things which are so uncomfortable that they *always* make me

ill—only I never think of them now. Mary desired I wouldn't, and I promised her. About there being only one heaven for all. Do you remember that very objectionable woman called Hester, dear? I think I saw her the other day."

This was one of the grains of wheat so often to be found in the small and airy nothings of Mrs. Clayford's conversation. Marian, knowing well, and generally respecting the dear little lady's habits, made no remark, but with her needle held in the air by her suddenly-arrested hand, she listened for what was to follow.

"Being so exceedingly near-sighted, I seldom get to know any features but those of the friends immediately around me. But that woman's struck me, and I knew her again. So I took half-a-crown from my purse—I was in the carriage waiting at Sanderson's door for a parcel—and gave it to somebody, who unfortunately was not the person I intended to have it. She was

gone. It was a little vexatious; but I certainly saw her, my dear, and the half-crown was intended as an excuse for getting her close to me, when I could have spoken, and asked after her son, about whom I have always had the greatest curiosity."

"He was drowned," said Marian.

"I don't believe that, my dear. People are buried when they are dead. Dead *and* buried, that is satisfactory. But unburied must mean that two opinions are not unreasonable. Many people believe him to be alive. You remember that I paid a long visit to Mrs. Angerstein. I really had not been well, and dear Mary was anxious about me. I had taken a fancy to Portspadron, and I said I would go to that hotel again; but Mr. Garret Naylor set his face against it. I never did attempt to combat any opinion of his. I never shall," said Mrs. Clayford, with the deliberate firmness of the mind-made-up manner. "He said I could pay Mrs. Angerstein a visit—for she had

kindly asked me. So, indeed, had Lady Glaucott, who, you know, is very fond of Mary. But I shrink from Sir Thomas. He is greatly to be admired, and I *do* admire him, without any doubt. But he is not quite a man for an invalid, unless the invalid be his wife, and Lady Glaucott was never strong."

Marian ventures to say that she remembers Mrs. Clayford went to Angersteins, and the little lady says,

"Yes, my dear, I did, and I got perfectly well. I am very fond of poultry. I don't mean to eat," she explained, with sudden recollectedness, "but to see and observe—cocks and hens, ducks and geese, particularly goslings; they are very interesting, and to me most amusing. The pigeons were wonderful, too, and the common flowers. Things which are no responsibility, but are purely amusing—which always seems to me to be the intention of the lower orders of creation—please me very much. I was

happy at Mrs. Angerstein's; she is a superior woman; and her people talked to me a great deal. Jerry never believed that that strange man was dead—but we could not have common flowers in London," said Mrs. Clayford, with a sigh; "it would look too conceited, I'm afraid."

Such talking brought Portspadron into Marian's life; she was thankful for the blessing that Mrs. Clayford was to her. It was at all points a most agreeable arrangement. It would not have been half as pleasant if Mrs. Clayford had never wandered through the Ridge walk, nor amused herself by observations concerning the habits and dispositions of Mrs. Angerstein's poultry.

Nothing could be more agreeable than the way in which it came to be quite natural to Mrs. Clayford to identify herself with all Marian's interests, and to talk of all her friends as if they had through all their lives belonged to her.

"We ought to be hearing how Mrs.

Frederick Naylor is, and how she liked her visit to Lord Mawley. When will she come? Had you not better write her a note, and ask her to lunch here, and bring Mrs. Harcourt?"

So Marian wrote, and a day was fixed for Lizzie to unburden her heart, which was full of many things; and on the appointed day she came. But Lady Florence, who had also been at Lord Mawley's, had seen Marian first, and put her in possession of the great facts that had made up the situation.

Teresa had been an object of interest, curiosity, and wondering speculation to Marian; for Marian was always angry with her—though not maliciously angry—in her heart.

"He would have had the living but for her—you know that—Herbert would have had the living. They had begun a negotiation which would have provided for their eccentric old friend; but they did not think

it worth while to go on when Teresa became an heiress. You know all that? So he was robbed twice over. Herbert knows it. His old pupil's letter told it all. I read it. It was that which made Mr. Mawley and Lady Mary take so vexed a part against Teresa. They felt as if she had played them a trick; but I am very glad they are all friends again. How did Lizzie behave herself?"

"Prosperous people always behave well, because they very generally never try to be other than they are. Lizzie has been called perfection. She is rich, beautiful, and full of accomplishments of one kind or other. She was an authority for everything; she was the fashion, and she did not know it. Everybody admired her, and she could not see what they were about. I was quite proud of her, and I enjoyed the sight of her youth and loveliness, her well-considered clothes, and her utter unconsciousness. It was beautiful and amusing; and Teresa, who

went with me—I had great pleasure in taking care of her, poor child," Lady Florence says tenderly. "She scarcely understood it. She came into my room and cried. She said that she had lost her place in her uncle's house, and that she was not at home there as she used to be. Lady Mary sat by her, and made civil talk. She is young, and she meant no harm. But Teresa resented it, as tending to make a stranger of her, where she ought to have been at home. But really it was all her own fault, and because of her own awkwardness. She felt in disgrace, and she took the part of the forgiven one. She had not either wit or strength to be as if nothing had happened. And then *there* stood Lizzie! I cannot tell you how she was admired. She grew more charming every day, because she grew happier. And Mr. Naylor—well, he was always a hero of mine. He has genius. How nice genius is," said Lady Florence, smiling, with an air

of intense enjoyment. "He knows and he feels—he has sympathy and comprehension. Everybody was delighted with him. Poor Teresa was surprised, I think; and she wrote letters of a dozen pages long to Mrs. Belville every day. They were wise not to ask them there then; but Lady Mawley always knew what she ought to do. She has tact, which is a great gift."

Lizzie's account was very different, but not at all contradictory. She told Marian, and the listening, approving Mrs. Clayford, how kind they had been to her—how delightful and how clever Lady Mary was! Her heart was overflowing with the abundance of agreeable obligations; but she knew nothing about herself. There was not a word of self in all her story. The secret of Lizzie's charm was not far to seek—so her wise considering sister thought as she heard and was satisfied. But of Frederick's perfections there were long circumstantial histories; and the amount of his successes,

carefully reckoned up, made a prosperous story. Lizzie was puzzled by Teresa's manner, and she spoke at great length about her. She said she was nervous, uncertain, unhappy.

"Oh! I know she is unhappy; and people say she is going to be married to an Italian count. They all know him. And Lady Mary had his photograph, which is dreadful!" said Lizzie. "Lord Mawley said he should make a strict inquiry into his history. But his son said it was no use to trouble themselves about it. She *could* do as she pleased, and he was sure that she *would*."

On the whole, Lizzie had been interested in Teresa in a low, pitying sort of way, as one is with a pet animal who has got to be consoled for some failure in its fortunes.

"She is pretty," she said; "but Frederick thought she was ill-dressed; and her voice is thin. I knew that she wanted to hear about Herbert, so I told Lady Mawley, as

she stood by, that he was quite well, and coming home very soon. Lady Mawley said, 'We must get him a living, or some curacy which may lead to one.' And then she asked if he would be with me. I said 'No. My mother would go to her lodgings in Trowberry Terrace, and receive him there.' I looked at Teresa. She got so red and angry-looking. I wonder what she felt?"

CHAPTER X.

CHEQUERED HOURS.

This life is all chequered with pleasures and woes,
That chase one another like waves of the deep,
Each billow, as brightly or darkly it flows,
Reflecting our eyes as they sparkle or weep.
So closely our whims on our miseries tread,
That the laugh is awaked ere the tear can be dried;
And as fast as the rain-drop of pity is shed,
The goose-plumage of folly can turn it aside.

MOORE.

"OH! yes; of course they were very kind to me," said Teresa Mawley to Mrs. Belville, when she had returned to the gorgeous mansion, which had become to her not much more than a gilded prison, with a very gentle jailor. "Yes, they were all very kind. But to receive civility where one has been accustomed to be the dispenser

of kindness is to undergo a very quee operation. I declare that I could scarcel tell what they meant, sometimes. An then, of course, no one understood me.] is useless to expect to be understood," sai Teresa, with a groan. "I declare I coul have cried to see those early flowers, whic I have so often worn to please——" A gre sob was suggestive of the unmentioned i dividual who had admired pink hepoticas i her pretty hair. "Why was I ever happy? asked Teresa, when she had recovered he voice. And Mrs. Belville said,

"Do you know that you will have re eyes for ever and ever, if you don't tak care. Don't be silly about happiness. Wh should you make your eyes like those of white rabbit? Tell me that. It would b more to the purpose."

Teresa, having been thus scared into goo behaviour, sat silent, and Mrs. Belville, wh was not unkind in her wrath, said,

"Tell me facts. Did Lady Mawley see

really glad to see you? And did she say anything civil about me? And what about Marmaduke? I should like to see the dear Grange again! Have they papered the drawing-room? It wanted it dreadfully!"

"Everything is quite different. I hardly knew the rooms again. Mr. Naylor has been there. They are *such* friends, and they have got *such* theories! So everything is entirely different. Walls, windows, and doors are the only things left; and the doors are the same old dark mahogany, but now brilliant to behold. The walls are painted, and the great mirrors are all gone, and little ones are there instead. They use all sorts of odd expressions—they talk of ladies' bowers, and chimney-corners. The seat in the hall is a settle, and what ought to be a wardrobe is called a press."

"How ridiculous!"

"It is all very comfortable, I believe," sighed Teresa. "It made me think more than I ever had thought before of a house

of one's own. Mrs. Frederick Naylor is extremely pretty."

"Like him?"

"No, not at all. She has a kind of golden haze all over her."

"Why, what's the matter with you?" asked Mrs. Belville.

Prosaic Teresa had hit on a good expression for once in her life. There was a golden radiance on Lizzie's brown hair, and her sweet brown eyes gleamed like sunshine through her long, veiling eyelashes. Her colouring was soft, pure, and rich, with a most harmonious loveliness; and Frederick Naylor, when he chose her dresses, or arranged for her use the old treasures from the store-cupboard of other days, treated her adornments in the true artist spirit. His eyes could see the difference between the unrivalled colour of soft Indian gold, and the manufactured material of goldsmith's shops, and less discriminating people acknowledged, without being able to explain

it, what culture and genius had done for Lizzie.

"A rare creature," said Lord Mawley. "I remember my poor brother speaking of her."

Even Mrs. Belville, though she scorned Teresa's poetical description, was convinced of Lizzie's perfections; and it was no use for anyone to deny Frederick's genius, because the world was talking of it.

"She asked me to come and see her," said Teresa.

"What? You! See *her!* Why, indeed! I never heard of such a thing!"

"And I said that I would," continued Teresa.

"Of course you can go where ever you like. Do you mean to go to her father-in-law's?"

"That is where she lives. I got quite infected with their love of flowers, and their interest in all sorts of things being acclimatized. Old Mr. Naylor is a great man in his

way. I want to see his garden. I should like a pursuit," said Teresa, drearily, "perhaps that sort of thing would suit me."

"Well, there's sense in that. But I thought you were thinking of marrying?"

"They so laughed at his photograph. Mrs. Naylor said she could not laugh; it was a face that troubled her. She told Lady Mawley to take it out of her book."

"Well?"

"And she did, actually; and Lord Mawley burnt it."

"And so you won't have him? And only a few days before you went down there, you said that you had almost determined on marrying him. He would have left England before now but for you. He is met with in very good company. I don't want an Italian for a brother-law, but if you have determined against him, Belville ought to know. It was you yourself who introduced him to us, and asked us to be civil to him."

"Of course, I know that," said Teresa, languidly. "He plays and sings remarkably well. I thought he would amuse me. Everybody talks of his musical talents. I told Lady Florence, and she said I must be mad. It was such a strong thing for *her* to say."

"Only he ought not to be asked here," persisted her sister.

"Well, then, don't ask him. If you don't want the carriage to-morrow, I will have it to visit Mrs. Frederick Naylor."

"Have it whenever you like," said Mrs. Belville, good-naturedly. "But I must talk to Belville about the Count. He never liked it. And you can't change your mind back again after *he* knows. You understand that?"

"Yes; I quite understand. I shall have to lunch at Mr. Naylor's; and I ought not to leave home later than eleven o'clock."

There ended one rather important colloquy between these sisters.

Mr. Belville received his wife's communication that evening with an ejaculation that surprised her.

"The greatest imaginable relief to my mind!" he said. "The Count is an unmitigated scamp! but I am not in a position to prove it openly. I have had a stormy interview with him to-day, and the rogue threatened me—said he had Teresa in his power."

"But we have met him at such good places," said Mrs. Belville.

"While he was a political refugee—yes, of course. He has left that, and is trading on religious differences. I am tolerably sure that he was being found out, and so

'He bought a bible of the best translation,
And in his life he showed great reformation;
He walkéd mannerly, he talkéd meekly,
He heard three lectnres and two sermons weekly.'

There! it has all been said for me, and I could not have said it better. But he is not going to give up Teresa and her money

without a struggle, so prepare yourself for a fray. And listen to this, my dear,—I won't have that girl making my home a misery; we shall be the talk of the town—I foresee it; for she is thoroughly unmanageable, and has not your common sense."

"We must get her away somewhere, but I can't think where to place her in safety. Of course I can't go too."

"No, no; you are married to me, and I can't spare you. Is there no one to protect the girl while I get rid of the Count? She is such a little idiot, he would frighten her into anything."

"She is a dear little soul—indeed she is!" pleaded Mrs. Belville, "and I am beginning to be glad that she met Herbert's sister, and made friends with her. She is going to lunch with them to-morrow."

"Where?—at old Naylor's place?"

"Yes, to see the gardens."

"Give me my hat."

The hat and its wearer were out of the

house in five minutes, and a "Don't wait dinner," was all that Mr. Belville said. His wife made some excuse to her sister, and when the master of the house got back, about ten o'clock, he said,

"I have been at Naylor's. Such a place! —quite a sight! You can't see half in a morning, Teresa. They want you to come out with a determination to spend a day or two there. I wish you would. It will correct old bitternesses, which it is always a good thing to do. Here's a note from Frederick Naylor's wife; and you have been looking so pale and tired since you came back, that a variety would do you good; also, I want to be alone for a few days. Your Italian Count has turned out a very disagreeable sort of person, and he was exceedingly rude to me yesterday. Tell me the exact truth—have you ever written him any note or letter, or, in fact, put your hand to paper for him during the time of your acquaintance?"

Teresa began to whimper and bemoan herself; but Mr. Belville was more than firm.

"I shall call in Lord Mawley, and send you out of my house immediately, if I cannot get the truth out of you. Answer me at once, if you please."

It was in vain that his wife cast appealing looks to him across the table, and held her sister's hand behind the falling drapery that fringed its edge; she might as well have looked with praying eyes at the bust of a beautiful Bacchus on the sideboard, which was opposite to her, to make him stop his laughter. So she turned her entreating glances on Teresa, who, happily, in the midst of her alarm, could read the advice thus given, and, taking it promptly, said,

"Only once, when I lent him a hundred pounds."

"Any copy of what you said?"

"No."

"Do you intend to marry him?"

"I can't bear to think of him."

"Then go to the Naylors' for a few days. If necessary, we will get you asked somewhere else afterwards. You are not safe from serious annoyance while he is in England. If you will go quietly, and *hold your tongue*, I will manage it."

So Teresa, sobbing and sighing, and saying that she only wanted to be happy, like other people, and that she believed herself to be doomed to disappointment, and that there was no happiness in life for her, consented to hide herself for a few days in the shelter of Lizzie Naylor's home, saying, however to her sister,

"Of course I could not do it if *he* were in England. They will understand *that*."

When Mrs. Belville was alone with her husband, she said,

"Be civil to me; I require a great deal of attention, after seeing you in a fit of sternness. The last time you spoke in that way was when, after Laura's birth, you sent

away that drunken nurse. What are you going to do with the Count?—and, after this visit, what is to happen about Teresa?"

"I know nothing beyond the probable result of ordering the carriage for Teasy at eleven o'clock, my darling," he said. "Good night."

Poor little vexed, broken-down Teasy! Mr. Belville had told her she would get a red nose, and her sister had given most candid advice about her eyes. She knew that her voice was changed—Lady Mawley had said so; and she had felt how awkward her manner had become without her honest conscience being able to suggest anything to improve it.

Generally she had felt herself treated in a remarkable way during her visit to her uncle—sometimes as if she were a confirmed invalid, and sometimes as if something had happened which everybody made believe had never happened at all. People often become that which they are treated as being.

Teasy had begun to think of her health, and bemoan her circumstances—she had not enough natural form of character to take her own place; she was obliged to accept that which by general unpremeditated assent other people gave to her. So she had not been happy at Lord Mawley's—nor happy in her recollections after her return to her sister's. Any variety was agreeable. She had got to that restless, seeking state which is the punishment of such as have cast good gifts away. It was therefore with a heart fuller of hope than it had been for some time that she drove away the next morning. She was going to something new; she was getting away from a trouble, and she would enjoy her holiday. To herself, in the effort to minister to her vanity, and make excuses for the eccentricity of her adventure, she said that she should improve her mind by this visit to Mr. Naylor; but the *sauce piquante* that made the promised feast of reason pleasant, was that Lizzie was Her-

bert's sister. All the way, as she drove there, she wondered in her foolish little heart how she should conduct herself—whether she should be extremely friendly or moderately distant; whether she should say that Mr. Belville had not allowed her to bring a maid, or whether she should dress her hair for herself, and say nothing about it.

Every littleness that could inhabit the mind of a pretty, young, half-educated woman of the higher ranks of society, grew, budded, and blossomed during the hour and half's drive to Mr. Naylor's country house. The person so engrossed had just made up her mind to a course of most condescending dignity when the carriage stopped; and Teresa, scarcely out of her dream, found herself in the presence of a well-dressed and handsome woman, who came to meet her with a provoking smile—a smile made up of amusement, authority, and welcome, which made her feel as if she

were in the presence of her superior, and had to say her catechism. Teresa had intended to have the first word, but she was dumb.

"Miss Mawley, I am Mrs. Harcourt," said that faultless figure of upright dignity; and she was met by Herbert's mother.

CHAPTER XI.

A CHANGE.

And we will sit upon the rocks,
Seeing the shepherds mind their flocks,
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds make madrigals.

CHRISTOPHER MARLOW.

THERE was one thing that Mrs. Harcourt did so well that she must have been born to the doing of it—it was the keeping up of her respectability. If Teresa's plans had all been formed in the purest spirit of wisdom, she could not have brought one of them to perfection without Mrs. Harcourt's consent. Mrs. Harcourt could use the grasp of an iron hand if she liked—luckily it suited her disposition to sit still in velvet

gloves. Her reasoning powers failed, but her sensations of right and wrong *never* failed. She had very little human sympathy, but she loved her own like a tiger-cat; and if she was sometimes chary of words, she never missed her opportunities. She had for the first time seen Mr. Belville the night before. She had been called in by old Mr. Naylor to hear what he had to say, and to preside at their consultation.

Mr. Belville simply and speedily threw himself on their mercy. Would they extend their invitation to Teresa from hours to days? He wanted to get her out of the reach of the Count while he dismissed that gentleman, and Mr. Naylor's was the safest hiding-place he could think of.

When Mr. Naylor said that Mrs. Harcourt was with them, Mr. Belville's mind admitted a difficulty—"I had not realized that," he had said gravely.

Then they had sent for her to help them to decide on what was best. Mr. Belville

had had again to explain himself. He had done so in his most vigorous way. Teresa's state had been gone into.

"She's a failure," Mr. Belville said. "People are—that is women are, sometimes, in spite of money. By-and-by, she will spend her money in experimental volumes. When she has gone through a course of figures, and losses, and reduced her magnificent income to five hundred a year, she will marry, and be very happy. But just now she has to be pleased and protected. Are you willing to help?"

"We could not have *begun* to know her now," said Mrs. Harcourt, with emphasis. "But since my daughter has already made friends with her, I see no difficulty in doing as you say—enlarging the invitation from hours to days."

This was all that Mr. Belville wanted—standing room and breathing time, he called it. "I want time for the Count, and to see her uncle, if necessary," he said.

"I will be candid and tell you that for certain reasons we were going to send to her to ask her to postpone her visit," said Mr. Naylor. "To postpone it for a week at least."

"That would upset everything. I cry for mercy; don't do that!" said Mr. Belville. "My dear madam, there can be no necessity for that."

"None; since she will spend some days here. None. If my daughter does not receive her, I will. Say nothing about that, Mr. Naylor, if you please." So without any further explanation Mr. Belville had returned.

But when Teresa arrived she had to lunch with Mrs. Harcourt alone.

"A passing matter called away my daughter. Mr. Naylor is also away, attending a scientific meeting. Frederick is engaged, as he often is. You must content yourself with me, for the present."

Then Mrs. Harcourt told Teresa to fetch

some work, and come and sit with her. "I see you are casting longing eyes on the things about us. But Mr. Naylor must have the pleasure of showing you his treasures himself. I don't pretend to the learning and wisdom of the present day."

"It so reminds me——" Teresa stopped with a sob. She was thinking of her father's collections, and of Herbert, in the days of that Garden of Eden, by her father's side. But Mrs. Harcourt looked at her over her spectacles. "Bring forward that screen," she said, "the fire is too much for you—your eyes are red."

Teresa obeyed. What would she not have done if Mrs. Harcourt had commanded.

She sat there painfully desirous of being liked, disagreeably conscious of having very little to say; she had some easily done, idle sort of work in her fingers, and she worked so industriously that she was afraid of getting it finished; it added another anxiety to

her captivity, for she was as much a captive as if she had been fastened by mesmeric power to her ebony stool.

"You would be happier if you sat in that easy chair," said Mrs. Harcourt.

Teresa got up awkwardly and brought it forward, saying, "I suppose there are plenty of flowers in the conservatory?"

"Yes; Lizzie will be at home in an hour, I should think."

Mrs. Harcourt's thoughts did not run upon flowers. Neither, indeed, did Teresa's. She thought—she could not help it—of Herbert, whose mother was holding her there, spell-bound, as it seemed—whose voice was Herbert's, whose smile was his. But she so seldom smiled!

"You live with your sister?"

"Yes."

A silence, which Teresa could not break, and which felt like iron chains about her, and fettered her mind. She had no ideas; none except that it was so odd that she

should be there, listening to the steady click, click of the knitting-needles in the hands of Herbert's mother.

Mrs. Harcourt dropped out questions at intervals, surprised to find that Teresa had so little to say.

"You have never seen my eldest daughter, I think?"

"No; never." Her voice shook.

Mrs. Harcourt, with a bent head, again looked at her over her spectacles. A canary bird, who had so far been watching the scene with a stretched-out neck, after every hop from perch to floor of his gilded cage, now struck out a loud song suddenly, and Mrs. Harcourt started; she dropped a knitting-needle. Teresa was picking it up in an instant; but as she gave it into the thin white hand which was held out for it, she dropped on her knees, and burst into a fit of weeping at Mrs. Harcourt's side.

"My poor child," said the lady, tenderly,

with her finger-tips on her hair. "Don't agitate yourself."

"Can you ever forgive me?"

"Oh yes; there; get up. Of course you were forgiven long ago."

Now the operation of being made nothing of is a very lowering one. And there was that about Mrs. Harcourt's voice, words, and manner, even in the gentle tapping of the extreme ends of her delicate fingers on Teresa's false hair, that performed this operation in the most unmistakable manner. There was just the faintest conceivable echo of the slightest possible laugh in the air. Not that Mrs. Harcourt had really laughed—for she was not even smiling—but there was a sound almost of derision somewhere, as if wicked sprites were enjoying themselves, and Teresa was sensible of it.

She was feeling desperate—desperate enough to disobey Mrs. Harcourt; so she did not get up, but grovelled by the skirt of

her soft silk dress, and quite gave herself up to degradation.

If all the mortifications which she had made for herself at Lord Mawley's had been then counted up and administered, they would have been as nothing in comparison with what she had undergone in that hour with Mrs. Harcourt.

"If I might only ask you how Herbert is?" she sobbed forth, with a hidden face.

"My son—Mr. Harcourt? Oh, he is very well. Quite well, my dear. You have not blamed yourself too much about *that*, I hope. He is well, and coming back to me. He is to have his old curacy—where you knew him. Lord Mawley has managed it. He is to live in the new house that Frederick gave the plans for. The present vicar—I always forget his name—stays in the old house, which you remember. Get up, dear child. People should never kneel without a cushion. Mr. Harcourt is glad to get back to his old haunts, and to be

again among his early friends. It has been just agreed upon. The desire to get him back grew strong in their hearts after my daughter's first visit to them. It was the proposal, in the first place, of their old friend the present vicar, who took a great liking to Mr. and Mrs. Naylor; and he spoke to Lord Mawley."

"Did Mrs. Naylor know this when I met her there?"

"Yes, my dear. But she did not know that her brother would agree to the arrangement. We have heard of his consent since that."

An overpowering sense of her own smallness, a feeling that she was fast shrinking into nothing, quite overpowered the listening girl. She became humble all in a moment, as if her pride had been suddenly broken down, and there was nothing else to do but submit. She had lost everything—place, position, and the confidence that had been her right. Of course they could not con-

sult with her, after her conduct to Herbert. Of course everybody there who had once known him would be glad to get him back. Of course his family—his sister—would take the place which *then* had been entirely hers, when she had been supreme, and first in everybody's consideration. Everything was happening quite naturally, just as anyone might have expected; but in the midst of all these matter-of-course proceedings where was she?

With this forgotten and passed-over feeling in her heart, she looked at Mrs. Harcourt with a sad sort of lost expression which made that lady stare.

"What is the matter?" she said.

"It is one thing to avoid society, it is another to be abandoned by all and passed over by one's friends."

"But I don't understand," said Mrs. Harcourt, looking surprised. "Who passed *you* over?—who deserted *you?* You are dreaming, I think. But if our talk is getting pain-

ful, let us change the subject. You wish to see the conservatory?"

"No doubt I have deserved it all," said Teresa, thinking out loud, as naturally as if she and Mrs. Clayford had changed characters; "but everyone is not made of equal strength. I did not know that life had so many sides."

"You can get to the conservatory without going out of the house," said Mrs. Harcourt. She really did not understand Teresa, and the consciousness of not comprehending her, and the sight of her wan, worn-out face, made her uncomfortable.

She had a vague idea that she had conquered her enemy, but the old feeling that, if Herbert knew, he might be vexed, was having its turn, making her nervous, and subduing her. She turned round and took a severe survey of Teresa in the arm-chair, looking helpless and crushed, and she determined, at all risks, to speak her mind. Her courage rose to the occasion. Her know-

ledge that Lizzie might now return at any moment gave her the power of speaking to the purpose; so she began:

"Miss Mawley, you will be happier for listening to me. My son is one who can neither be raised nor lowered in the eyes of good men by want of money. Our losses fell on us after he had so distinguished himself that no loss was brought to *him*. I might say the same of my girls. Had that great grief come earlier it might have deprived them of the education which their position in life demanded. When you gave up your engagement to my son, you did it because you were ruled, at least for the moment, by a vulgar appreciation of money. Your sister despised Mr. Naylor. But all can't be rich from their birth, and only her ignorance can excuse her. If, by breaking your engagement, you freed my son from being tied to a wife who thought more of wealth than of good family, high character, education, and honour, you did him more good

than harm. Rouse yourself. Having made your choice, abide by it bravely. We bear you no malice. Be happy in your own way. Happiness is a thing which may be cultivated. Begin to do so here. You did not come here to——" Mrs. Harcourt's wisdom was beginning to fail her. She had much more in her mind, but how to say it had become a difficulty. She would have described the high moral lessons which this visit to Lizzie was capable of teaching, but she did not know how—also she heard a distant sound of wheels—so she said, "You did not come here to—to look like that." A carriage passed the window. "There's Lizzie!"

But it was not Mrs. Frederick Naylor. Yet the visitor walked into the house as unceremoniously. The room door opened, and there—a little roughened by the seafaring life, brightened by the salt breezes, healthy, happy, and handsomer than ever—stood Herbert. He saw his mother only—she was all that he expected to see. She

had known that he was returned, having heard from him from Southampton; and that day Lizzie had gone to Trowberry Terrace, to arrange for her mother to be there the next morning, ready to receive him. But his desire to meet her had made him do better than he had proposed. He had come in his eagerness earlier than he had thought possible when he wrote, and now he stood in her sight, with a good, glad face, hearing her bless him, and in a steady voice thank God. He took her in his arms a second time, saying,

"Mother, dear mother! Yes, I am quite well—stronger than ever. Thank you, mother. Where is Lizzie? And how is her hero, lover, and husband? I have brought home a heap of fine flowers for his father."

Then he stopped abruptly, seeing Teresa, who had kept in the background, with her head turned away.

"Here is one whom you did not expect,"

said his mother. "But *we* did not expect *you*. Your sister and Miss Mawley have become friends."

Herbert stood as stiff as a tree, and as speechless. He did not advance a step. Teresa did; but she stopped, halting in an uncertain way, for which no excuse was needed. The meeting was awkward enough for both of them.

"I hope Miss Mawley is well," said Herbert.

But the musical ring was out of his voice. It was purposely wanting in expression; his words were just what the moment required —a mere formality, that was all. He placed a chair for her, and looked her in the face. She had caught sight of herself in the looking-glass when turning aside, that his meeting with his mother might not be embarrassed by the knowledge of her presence; and she had a vivid remembrance of looking her worst. Her harassed heart had made her face as ugly as it could be,

and she knew that she looked ill, aged, and cross. Her humiliation had reached its lowest depth. But there are people who can be courageous in the extremity of danger, and who, where no danger is, can scream at a spider. And Teresa, being thus put to the proof, proved herself to be one who, when driven almost to desperation, can pause and help herself.

One glance at Mrs. Harcourt made that lady say, "You won't mind my leaving you for a moment." And she left them alone.

Teresa walked straight into the light, and faced Herbert.

"Mr. Harcourt," she said, in a wonderfully steady voice, considering the occasion, "I am glad to have the opportunity of apologising for a letter I once wrote to you, blaming you for what had occurred between me and Lord Plinborough. I beg your pardon. I wrote the letter in a passion of vexation. I am glad to be able to say this; and I am sorry that I did it"

"I knew that you could never seriously believe that I would injure you. I think that I said so to Marian, who read the letter to me, for I was very weak then. I said that your judgment of me would never be an unjust judgment. I did not keep the letter—I destroyed it, and forgot its contents. You did not believe what you wrote. Everybody is angry sometimes."

He did not approach her by a single step; he stood still and upright in the perfection of his manhood, and she felt herself but a poor mean little mortal in his presence.

"Have you been here long? Won't you sit down?"

"I should not have come, of course, if there had been any idea of seeing you; and yet I am glad—glad to have said what I *have* said."

"Thank you," said Herbert.

"Mrs. Naylor and I met at Lord Mawley's. She asked me to come and see her.

I came this morning, and I am to stay a few days."

"I am going to your uncle's to-morrow," said Herbert. "I suppose you have been there often?"

No other question could have so unlocked Teresa's lips.

"I!—often!—no! This is the only time I have been there since——" There was anguish in her voice and on her face.

"Do sit down," said Herbert; but she only came forward a step, and rested her hand on the table, as if to steady herself.

"I declare I wonder now how I lived through it. Everything was so exactly the same; all I looked at was just as if—as if—oh! how can I tell you? It seemed to be a cruel thing—that same unaltered aspect of all that we had lived among—everything the same, except my wrecked life."

She said it very earnestly and very truthfully, and Herbert looked at her steadfastly, and much surprised.

"Your wrecked life!" he repeated.

"Yes. What else can I call it? The home in which I was born, lived in, changed —its old, and to me perfect state, made holy by so much happiness, and by my father's memory, described by Lady Mary with a composed superciliousness which drove me half mad, as if nothing had been good or right, where all was happiness until *she* got there; Lady Mawley so fond of her daughter-in-law; Marmaduke so strange; my uncle so grandly merciful—everyone in a combination to mortify me, and bring every grief to mind. Did not those things teach me? And could I see the old parsonage, and go across the lake in the same boat, with the dipping boughs plashing in the water as they used to do, and the wild-fowl, and—and—and everything," said Teresa, failing in the climax, and breaking down weakly where she felt the most.

"Those things happen to everybody. Change belongs to life," said Herbert.

"Yes," said Teresa, a little ashamed of her vehemence, and making a resolution against fine language. "Yes; but to most people, when things change, other things come in their places. That is life, I suppose. Those who lose one thing get another, and that prevents regret. *I* lost *all.*"

"Excuse me," said Herbert, "but no one can understand you as thoroughly as I do." He remained standing quite still, and, indeed, it was something in his unbending stiffness that had made her feel it was possible to let her words run on; and now, if possible, he seemed to stand in a way more unapproachable than ever, when, in a firm voice, though not ungentle, he said, "Let me advise you not to indulge in morbid recollections of all the loss that your father's death brought to you. It must always be an irreparable loss—the death, I mean, of such a father. But all consequences you

were prepared for. The *exchange* of circumstances is a true idea; you prove it in yourself. You may be too young to value what your father's death gave you, but the world would not count it as loss."

"It was worse than all besides to me."

"But such vexations as you may be contemplating can be easily repaired," said Herbert. He said this with a faint note of jesting in his voice, like one who quotes a popular saying, and he, by a gesture, seemed to indicate that he made her a bow.

"Never!" she said, almost angrily, and yet getting red up to the roots of her hair for shame.

He stood still. Would not anything make him move one step nearer to her? She was more in love with him than ever. He was more worthy of her love, and she knew it. She was wondering whether he could love her again; she was panting with the strong desire to discover what no power could reveal.

But between him and her was the golden barrier of three thousand a year; and he would sooner have died than ask her to marry him now.

Teresa dropped into the chair he had placed for her several minutes before; she said,

"Of course you will never forgive me?"

"You were never anything else but forgiven," said Herbert. "When you wrote the final words I had no surprise. I had expected them. The tie between us had been worn so thin that its breaking was a relief to both of us."

"Then you had ceased to love me?"

"I come of a race who have gloried in their wives. I have not the will to spend my life in petting a capricious woman, or in such condescensions to her weakness as trying to make the best of things which require neither excuse nor explanation. Knowing what you had become, how could I regret your decision? Yet I think——"

He stopped.

"Go on," she said eagerly. "I am very glad to listen to you. What were you going to say?"

"I think that this woman I once loved, I love still. I find her in my memory. When I am again in those places where she used to be, I may talk to her as to those loved ones among our dead; I shall see her in my fancy by her father's side."

Herbert was looking over Teresa's head, out of the window into the far-away of the landscape, like a man in a dream.

"But I am not dead," said Teresa, rising up, and standing still a moment by his side, on her way to the door. "And it was because I was under a delusion, which has passed away now; and it is so difficult for some people to stand alone. I don't care about memory, except when I have nothing else to care for. Can't you see that we are both doing the same thing, thinking of each other? I am so glad you think of what I

once was. All the stupidity is over, Herbert, and I am just the same."

He had taken her hand, and put it on his arm; but he was still looking far away, with his head turned towards the window. He never spoke.

"Is it not silly to stand like this?" asked Teresa. "If any see us they will make sure we are going to be married."

He turned now, and bent his head towards her, looking intently into her upturned face.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"You are thinking about that odious money. Suppose I tell you that I have only two hundred a year left?"

He took her in his arms.

"I am so happy! it shakes me."

He let her go, and held her smiling face so as that he might look at it by the light of the great joy that was visible on his own.

"So it was only the money that made you so hard to humble. Are you going to

refuse to marry me when you know I am richer than ever? I was not made to be your shuttle-cock, sir, so you must take me, money and all."

When Lizzie came back she was overpowered by amazement to see Herbert and Teresa together.

"Oh! I was so wise to make friends with her," she said; "you none of you praise me enough."

CHAPTER XII.

AT FAULT.

What, because some clowne offends,
Wilt thou punish all thy friends?

WITHERS.

THE news of this turn in Herbert Harcourt's fortune came to Marian at Mrs. Clayford's. She and the old lady made merry over it. Lady Florence came in quite a flutter of pleasure.

"You forgive her now, Marian?"

"She is my benefactress. How much I should have lost if her wilfulnesses had not been the means of sending me to Portspadron. Only think of the great cupboard; would my mother ever have gathered together that harvest of good things if she

hadn't come down to say good-bye to Herbert?"

"You thought Teresa silly, but she was only scared, and run away with. And you would not make the best of yourself to Mrs. Belville."

"And why should I?" asked Marian. "But I will make amends. I am going to Trowberry Terrace to-morrow, and my mother and I could get a cab and return Mrs. Belville's call together. No doubt Mrs. Belville is an excellent woman, but she does not exhibit her perfections of a morning, I suppose. I shall make Teresa rebellious. She is evidently wise enough to know her own happiness, and clever enough to find it, after once throwing it away. And, according to modern theories, success is always respectable. She loves Herbert. I am quite satisfied about that. Don't praise her, Lady Florence. Praise is apologetic, and I am jealous about my brother's wife. How I wish they were married!"

Everybody talked of the wedding. It was the great subject in their own world. Portspadron rejoiced, and the news was treasured as an additional pleasure with which to welcome Sir Thomas. The time of his return had come, and a multitude of warm hearts rejoiced to meet him. Lady Glaucott came up to London, and she went to her friend Mrs. Garret Naylor's house. Marian saw her, and the remembrance of the last days at the Towers rose with a bitter memory. Lady Glaucott could only talk of Sir Thomas, Charley Grandison, and Angersteins. She had seen a great deal of late of Mrs. Angerstein, and she was never tired of speaking of her. She said that Alfred was better. At present Jerry drew him about in a wheel-chair. He could only bear the motion of a carriage for a short time daily. But he almost lived in the open air. It was a bright April time, and the soft sea-breezes gave him life. Then a good thing had happened about Danesford. It

was let. Lord Zoffany had taken it. It was let for fourteen years, and Lord Zoffany's sister, Lady Claudia, a good deal younger than he, lived with him, under the care of a charming duenna, Mrs. McFain.

"I have known all about them for a long time. I recommended the house to them. You know he has been abroad for years. I am proud of my good deeds. Mr. Bellingsby would never have lived there himself, and empty houses disgrace a country. Lord Zoffany is interested in all that interests Alfred, who says it is a great trouble off his mind."

"And will he always live at Angersteins?" asked Marian, speaking soft and low, and sadly, too, for she always thought of him with an aching heart.

"I think so," said Lady Glaucott, gently.

Then, after a few days of waiting, Sir Thomas came to his wife. She had seen him before, having gone to Southampton, where he had landed. But Sir Thomas was

a public man, and the servant of his country, so she had had to leave him to his masters, and to the routine of interviews and presentations. At last, when all business matters had been transacted, and Sir Thomas was his own again, he came to Mr. Garret Naylor's, and Lady Glaucott, like a white dove, with much curtseying, bowing, and cooing, carried her mate off to the nest at Rosdew.

The only thing that cast a passing shadow over this return of a man who had served his country to perfection, and gained the thanks of all parties, was the absence of his adopted son.

"It was a hasty thing," said Sir Thomas. "He had done his duty there. And had he really desired to go back, I could have managed it for him in a better way. It was a hasty thing. What was there to account for it?"

It was a question that remained unanswered. Only Lady Glaucott guessed that he had not prospered with Marian. She only

guessed it. He had never given her his confidence. But, as to his admiration, he had never been at any pains to conceal it. Everybody knew that.

It made Sir Thomas very grave—he received Marian with the marks of deep thought on his face, and with an inquiring eye.

"Why did you send Charley away?"

She heard the stern tone in his voice, but she loved him nothing the less for it. She met his question with another.

"Why did he go?" She would say no more. "Why did he go?"

Sir Thomas could not make her out—he wanted comfort, but Marian could not give it to him. He asked for knowledge, but it was not to be found.

"Wherever Charley goes," he said, one day, when he had worn out the subject in a hopeless way—"wherever he is, and whatever he does, he will act, and be known, as a true man. He had the making of a hero

in him from a boy. He had the *light* heart, that does not wear itself out grieving over impossibilities, or longing after nothings; and the *strong* heart, that never fails under trial, nor faints at suffering. He has no selfishness. He can measure other men's greatness, and he makes no calculation of his own. Whatever glory came to him, he would wear his honours 'lightly, like a flower.' Can you contradict me, Marian?"

"I never doubted Charley Grandison. I have never failed in my faith. Ever since we were very young together, I have trusted him."

It was pleasant to Marian to make this confession of her feelings aloud, and to this long-beloved and grey-haired witness. He looked at her with a quiet smile, and said, "Thank you." But the spirit within her was vexed.

Before Sir Thomas and Lady Glaucott left London, Mr. and Mrs. Garret Naylor gave a great dinner-party.

"They are my friends in need," said Marian, on receiving the note, which asked Mrs. Clayford and herself. "They are going to have Mr. and Mrs. Belville there for the first time—oh! 'lately made their acquaintance'—how lucky! And 'are going to ask Herbert, because Teresa comes with her sister.' Delightful! They have been three weeks in a state of bliss; and I have not yet seen Teresa."

"I fear *I* may have been a difficulty, my dear," said Mrs. Clayford. "When your brother was here, and spoke of Miss Mawley's friends, I said that I never made new acquaintances. I saw that he felt it; but I did not explain myself. Mary always told me that I was not good at explanations. But we will make friends at this dinner-party; and you can always do as you please."

"I believe I am going to like Teresa. When she was left to herself, she got Herbert back, which was a great thing. He

was always utterly unpersuadable; and he was never in the wrong in his life."

"What a charming character!" said Mrs. Clayford.

Marian enjoyed her quiet laugh, as she had enjoyed the power of making wicked observations about Herbert. Mrs. Clayford seemed to have a mind incapable of the comprehension of evil. It was one of the drolleries of Marian's life to find her taking blame for praise. But when the night of the dinner-party came, Mrs. Clayford was greatly interested in all the details of dress and ornament which were to make Marian more than commonly perfect.

"There is so much in first impressions," she said. "I wish Mrs. Belville to be struck with you."

"She was that some time since," Marian says. "I am sure she was greatly struck. But I am not sure that I should know her without her bonnet."

"I am told she is a very nice woman, a

good wife, a careful mother, pretty and pleasant."

"She is pretty—I remember that."

"In what style, my dear?"

"Fair, fat, and scented, with an indignant complexion, trembling eyes, an agitated manner, and an hysterical voice. But then she was in a passion of vexation, sitting on Mrs. Grigshaw's black sofa, with her velvet skirts gathered close, in fear of contamination."

"I thought Mrs. Grigshaw singularly civil, and decidedly clean," gravely remarked Mrs. Clayford.

"So did I," said Marian; and Mrs. Clayford's mind, having got upon the road of cleanliness, went off at speed, telling Marian of the martyrdom she had once suffered through a scourge of black beetles.

"We left the house," she said. "I was driven out of it, as much as if they had been an invading army. And I am sure Mrs. Grigshaw is an estimable person. She

has always been most agreeably respectful to me. But as you have never seen Miss Mawley, I should like you to look your best, and it would gratify your family, I am sure. Madame Clary might send some one to dress your hair, and it would please Mr. Garret Naylor. He likes well-dressed people in his rooms, because he talks better when there are no distractions. An ugly thing is a great distraction to him, though he never looks twice at what is *not* ugly, however beautiful it may be."

Mrs. Clayford talked away, netting slowly, with careful hands, and by the help of a silver stirrup on a little foot, which appeared to the beholder as no more than a bow and a buckle; and Marian diligently gathered up, as was her habit, the stray scraps of information that dropped from her lips, and profited by them at her leisure. The immediate result was that, being full dressed, she satisfied Mrs. Clayford's criticizing eyes,

helped by spectacles and the glare of many lights.

"I am more than pleased—I am delighted, and obliged to you, Marian. I quite envy your friends so sweet a sight. Now we will go. Take care of your dress. Oh, dear me!"

And so Mrs. Clayford carried off her young friend with a satisfied heart, and without any fear of Mr. Garret Naylor troubling her conscience, knowing very well that the beauty of the evening was safe in her brougham.

It was a large party. Mr. Garret Naylor liked numbers, and as he knew how to manage numbers, there was a tolerable certainty of everyone being pleased. After an entertainment at this gentleman's house, guests went away flattered. To provide the pleasure is only doing half a duty; the flattery must be provided too. No man knew this better than the member for Trevarna. He treated his guests as well as if they had

all been his constituents, and they must have experienced all the delicate pleasures of bribery without any of its corruption. Very few would leave his house that night without feeling that they had distinguished themselves. Then they would say how delightful their host and hostess were—how clever, educated, and well-bred—how perfect she was in womanly feeling and delicate tact, and how exceedingly well Mr. Garret Naylor talked. No wonder he had succeeded so well at the Bar—no wonder that people said the government could not do without him—that good sense, clear-headedness, and ready speech made him quite invaluable, and that he would get a peerage before he died.

There was never a greater success than the dinner we are at present engaged upon. There was Teresa, blushing, ashamed, afraid, yet happy and triumphant; there was her sister, making the best of failure, and, what is worse, of her mistake. Condescending

and consenting she intended to be, but all acting requires an audience, and not finding any listeners, she accepted people's civil speeches, and said, as they did, that her sister and Mr. Harcourt would make a handsome couple—all the Harcourts were good-looking—several people had heard that they were a very handsome family. But Mrs. Belville gathered in wisdom that night, and stored it carefully. Though she was this "somebody" that friends delighted in remembering, she was in a world where to have an uncle who was a baron was a fact scarcely remembered, except by the man who put the guests' names before their seats at table.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Garret Naylor had the distinctest knowledge and recollection of who's who, and gave every man his due with unfailing attention; but they were not going to make their dinner dull by talking to people who did not know what to answer, or by lowering the general tone of

cultivated conversation to the comprehension of pretty Mrs. Belville.

She knew by her woman's wit, which was soon in action, that she was among her masters, and she took the learner's and listener's place with adroitness not a little to be admired.

Teresa gave up all idea of contributing to the general pleasure, and contented herself with looking happy, and remembering that she was once again engaged to Herbert. When he talked, she sat admiring; when he was listened to, she rejoiced. Something more than the old days had come. The world had enlarged, and among the best men stood Herbert. She saw him in his own world now—a world of men. Though half frightened at the learning, wisdom, and knowledge that were around her, she was very glad. She had not thought of this when vexing herself over the hepaticas, and sighing at the sight of the spreading lake, and the memories it brought

to her. What were those memories to present facts, with Herbert put to the proof before her eyes, and honoured with wise men's applause?

"You are a very lucky girl," said Mr. Belville, confidentially, in the course of the evening. "He's a man among men, and uncommonly handsome."

"Oh! I don't now care about his good looks, in the least," said Teresa; and she spoke the truth. "But I am proud of him," she added, with a genuine blush of delight.

But perhaps the really droll moment of the evening was when Herbert took Marian to Mrs. Belville, and said,

"You do not know my sister?"

He knew very well that there was an undeniable perfection on Marian's person, and that it extended to her manners when such was her pleasure. He left it to her now to do and say what she pleased. Mrs. Belville was confused, but she was prevent-

ed speaking by Marian saying, "I am very happy to know you!" just as if she had never seen her before. So Mrs. Belville held out her hand, and made friends with one of her little laughs, which said plainly enough that she remembered Trowberry Terrace, and that nobody could help that now.

When the gentlemen rejoined the ladies after dinner, there was one more added to their number. It was Mr. Bellingsby. Sir Thomas came in with his hand on his arm, and Lady Glaucott and Mrs. Garret Naylor welcomed him warmly.

"I was so afraid you would not come. Mr. Naylor never waits dinner, you know. We are so glad to see you! But you look pale still." She turned to Marian. "We would not say that he was expected. He was to come up for medical advice. But he looks better on the whole."

Alfred was speaking to Marian now, and

she was looking sadly beautiful into his wan face.

"I wish you could tell me how you really are," she said in a whisper.

"Well enough to be with you to-morrow, after my early visit to the doctor," he said. "And as to how I really am—I have looked in the glass, and I think that I am exactly what I look."

Marian could have wept.

There was Sir Thomas drawn into Indian talk by a knot of eager listeners. There was discussion as to measures, opinions as to results, prophecies as to the future, and Charley's name on Sir Thomas's lips as the man who had said *that*, and written *this*—as one of the most clear-sighted observers of events, and one to be relied on before all others for accuracy of judgment; a fine-tempered, open-hearted man, who could see things as they really were, never to be led away by groundless hope or warped by dismal forebodings—one whose opinion had

great weight with older officers. And in his letters this step-son of his had said——

But there Marian lost all sense of what Sir Thomas was proving by the help of his Indian correspondence. She had heard the praises of Charley Grandison as plainly as she might have heard the note of a trumpet; after that all was confusion; for, close to her, like one who had come back from the gate of death, stood Alfred; and he had said that it was through Charley Grandison that he had beheld that terror, and that his life had been maimed and crushed by Charley's hand.

She looked at Mr. Bellingsby, and their eyes met. He, too, had heard what Sir Thomas had been saying, and Marian saw that he was very sorry for her in his heart. There was a talk in the room, as to who Alfred was. Herbert took him away to speak to Teresa. But he came back to Marian's side, saying,

"May I stay here? Send me away if I bore you."

"I won't send you away," said Marian. But it was an inexpressible relief to her when Mrs. Clayford joined them, and occupied the time till they returned home with a playful, chattering cataract of ceaseless nothings.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE QUESTION.

"Wilt thou take this man to be thy wedded husband?"

MARIAN had returned from Mrs. Garret Naylor's in one of those moods which her mother had often, in the past, called *hard*. Her mind, braced up to the work which lay before her, could not give itself genially—only as a matter of duty—to the minor matters of life. She now felt as she had often felt when counting her shillings, and calculating what indulgences she could allow her household during the remainder of the half-spent quarter. In those days she could not enter into idle chatter before the sum was proved, the plan

laid out, and the resolution made; so now she heard the words, without knowing their meaning, that Mrs. Clayford kept pouring forth in her low musical voice, unintelligible in the streets, and with the accompanying sound of the wheels, and evidently not needing any answer.

Marian only thought of the morrow, when she should see Alfred, and of what he would have to say to her, and of what she might find to say to him. She knew that she regarded him with so sublime a pity, and a sorrow so sweet, that the tenderest love could scarcely be a thing more gentle or more kind. She loved him well enough for marriage; she knew that perfectly well. But he stood before her as something more than a lover, and as something different from his original self; he was Charley Grandison's accuser, and she could never ally herself with any man who could believe evil of him.

She considered for a moment how Alfred

Bellingsby might combat such feelings; then she cast all that aside, saying to herself,

"Of course I am unreasonable. To be reasonable would drive me wild. Charley try to kill a man for love of *me!* Charley a murderer—distinctly, in intention a murderer, for *my* sake! And driven to crime by his own blindness, because he could not long ago see the love that was his, when it was unsoiled by life's cares and untroubled by fear—when no doubt had ever checked it! Charley trying to kill a man for the dead love, when he had passed the young living devotion by without a serious thought! Charley ever, for any cause, lift his hand against his friend!"

So she debated with herself while they drove home, coming back to the common life of common things just before the carriage stopped, and in time to hear kind Mrs. Clayford say,

"I am sure you will agree with me, if

only I am successful, dear Marian," and to answer,

"Yes, I have no doubt; but what is it?"

"Oh! never mind. But if you are going to stay at home to-morrow morning, I shall go out before luncheon."

"I am going to stay at home. Mr. Bellingsby is going to call early."

"He told me so. Keep him to luncheon. I enjoy hearing of Angersteins. And I like Mr. Bellingsby. He looks dreadful. But how sweetly happy Lady Glaucott looked; and I honour Sir Thomas, though your dear father was a more delightful person. Good night, dearest. How happy you make me, Marian! I told your sister, who is a brilliant creature, how much I am your debtor. And she so thanked me for being the means, in some sense, of giving her mother into her charge. I like family feeling; it is a beautiful thing. Your brother is a grand creature! I admired him exceedingly, and Miss Mawley, such a happy little sparkling being.

My love, I have so much to say. I have had a most agreeable evening, and it was an elegant repast. Mary has learnt all about that kind of thing. There are never any faults *there*."

And so Marian and her friend parted with a last "good night." The morning came; how time passed was scarcely noted by Marian, as she entered on the day's domestic duties, and saw Mrs. Clayford, without questioning her, go away in her carriage in the company of her trusted maid-servant. Then Marian sat down, and she became aware suddenly of the peace that was all around her, in which the ticking of the clock sounded with silvery sweetness, marking the quietness of the room into which the sun of that Spring morning stole through the dark shining leaves of the camellias which filled a stand in the window. In that new London, at that hour, it was as quiet as at the Groves at Portspadron, and old thoughts of home came back to

Marian, and so occupied her that she rose in surprise when the door opened and Alfred Bellingsby walked in.

"Have you come from your doctor?" she asked.

"Yes—straight."

"What did he say?"

"When is Herbert going to be married?"

"I must know what he said—*something* you can tell me, surely?"

"Do you think his marriage will be within the month?"

"Mr. Bellingsby, I don't know about Herbert. I don't care about knowing. I want to know about you."

"About me? Oh! I am going to live till I am seventy, with great care and good nursing. I have had such a wrench in my back that the spine never can thoroughly recover. At present I have to lie down; and I walk with irons round me. I have to suffer pain; I have to buy a life which can never have any of those things in it which

make life to a man like me, with bodily suffering and unabated tedious care of an unrecognized self." He had gone on saying more than he had intended saying; and then, without looking at her, he, after an instant's pause, spoke again—"All this I have got to do; and, so doing, I may propitiate nature to do her best. That is what the doctor says."

"And what is the best that nature can do?" asked Marian, in a very gentle voice, yet with unfaltering speech.

"The best—and being a man of a naturally good constitution, I expect the best—is that I may become a sound cripple, never again able to live the life I have always led, but able to enjoy a different life with as few regrets as I can manage. I am beginning to understand the advantages of education," he said, with a dreary attempt at a moment's gaiety.

"Do you suffer?" asked Marian.

"Yes. Occasionally severely. The back

—from the spine to the limbs; finally, the head—then I succumb."

"What does that mean?"

"I go to bed. The room is darkened, the house kept quiet. I take a dose of the last great pain-subduer, and time and patience bring peace. I wake from a sort of trance, and am too lazy to speak. I hear Joan with her calves, and Jerry eloquent over the last brood of wonderful chickens. It is all music to my pacified nerves. Once I heard an inquiry about myself, and a kind word and a deep 'God bless him!' I could hardly keep the tears out of my eyes. I felt as if I had lived a long life, and could have gone away to the unseen world on that good prayer. But I am stronger. These luxuries are only for those who are weaker than I am now. I have told you all, as you wished to know."

"Yes," said Marian. Then "And you have let Danesfield to Lord Zoffany?"

"Mr. Naylor did all that for me. Lord

Zoffany has a delightful sister, who is to marry Lord Plinborough. When Lady Florence Reinecourt was spoken to as to a residence she named Danesford. It was a great relief to me. When the young lady is married, an elder sister, a widow, comes to live with the brother. Oh! it was a great relief," groaned Alfred.

"Are you in pain?" asked Marian.

"No. I suppose I have a trick of groaning." He made a pause, and then said, "I wish you would undertake to cure me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Marian, like a terrified child; and between laughing and crying she wiped the tears from her eyes.

"Let us talk it through at once," said Mr. Bellingsby. "Of course you know that my mother told me? Not knowing whether I was to live or die, I could say nothing. But I *do* know now. I will not for a moment do you the injustice to suppose you would give a man up for even such a crushing event as has befallen me. I shall be

another man as to bodily strength—I shall never hold an oar, or be on deck in a storm again, as long as I live, probably. But I am not going to be disabled from the usual life of a man on shore. In a year I shall either die from some unseen cause, or be strong enough for an easy life. Nothing has happened to me to divide me from a woman who has promised to be my wife."

"I am glad to believe that—I mean I am very glad to think you will recover," stammered Marian.

"So it is not *that* which parts us."

"Oh! no, not that."

"Is it that I got it all from Captain Grandison's hands?"

"Oh! Alfred," cried Marian, with despair in her voice, "it is so hard to say it all over again; it is so hard to make anyone understand me. I suffer so from the cruel position in which I feel placed."

"Try to say it once more," said Alfred, gently.

"It is that I could not marry anyone with whom I must for ever differ about the greatest, saddest thing in his life."

"You need not differ. Believe me. Why not?"

"I can't—I could not. It seems to me that, if I did, I should die."

"But it is disease of the mind to turn away from truth. You *can* believe me. If I say, as I do, that I saw him, spoke to him, handled him; that he said I should never possess you, and threw me over the bridge with an evident intention to take my life—what more can you hear? If you see me, if you possess the evidence of the piece I tore in my fall from the collar of his coat, what more can you have?"

"Years and years ago, in a life where all seemed good, he was very dear to me, as I was, in a sisterly way, to him, and he said, 'Trust me.' I am haunted by the echo of those words. I *can't* believe he would do that great sin—I *can't*."

"What would you wish done?" asked Alfred.

"I have no wishes. If you could only forget it all—all about *me*, I mean."

"But it is my turn to say '*I can't*,' if you come to that."

"Well, then," said Marian, feeling herself possessed by a sort of desperate courage, "I do not believe it was Charley who injured you that night. Why should he be judged unheard? He lost his cloak. How do you know who took it? A man has a right to be accused. Accuse him!"

"He was my friend from boyhood. I could swear to the man. There is corroborative evidence. He fled. He left the country. How could I accuse him? What should I get by it? You would not be happier as my wife, because I had brought about the ruin of my friend."

"No. You are too certain to accuse him. Oh! poor Charley! But I *can't* think evil of him. I will trust him to the end."

"Then your friendship is stronger than your love?"

"Yes."

"My mother said it. She told me not to venture on you, Marian. If that was the case, to set you free."

She dropped her head on her folded hands, resting them on the table, and wept bitterly.

"Perhaps something may happen in a year or two. We may get light from some unexpected quarter. He might be generous, and confess it. When I am strong enough to make a home, and take a wife to it, I shall come to you again."

"Leave me for ever, Alfred—I shall never marry."

"You will either marry me or Charley," said Alfred. "Good-bye, Marian—you are free—good-bye."

So he left her alone, weeping, and feeling her heart wrung to its centre, but trusting Charley still. She went out; she did what she could to strengthen the mind and

refresh the body. She met her brother, who was on his way to see her. He was full of happiness. The wedding-day was fixed, and he had come, he said, to tell Marian. But what he really wanted was to hear Marian praise Teresa, and this she found out, and she was quick to gratify him to his heart's content.

No one knew the secret of *her* life; no heart had kept any record of the trouble that had dwelt in hers. She felt this, and for a moment felt it keenly. A question rose in her mind whether it was not a great perversity on her part to elect to walk thus lonely to the end, because she could not give up that trust in Charley Grandison which she had kept from her youth. Had he not himself given her cause to disbelieve him? But she stifled these cruel suggestions, as she had stifled others. It was not a thing to reason about. Herbert, as if he knew what was passing in his sister's mind, began to talk about Charley.

"I should have liked to have had Grandison at our wedding," he said. "He is such a dear old fellow, and we were boys together. He's a capital fellow. There is no one I like better than Charley. You heard the talk last night? There will be a row in India—all the old wise ones expect it; and, if there is, Charley will just be in the thick of it all, which is exactly what he would like, and he is sure to come out a hero. Such a word-and-a-blow kind of fellow I never saw. It was always so. Dear old Mr. Angerstein used to reprove him for rashness. 'Sir, you never consider until you repent; it is the characteristic of a rash man, and a rash man is a thoughtless man, and a thoughtless man I trust you'll never be.'"

Herbert laughed as he imitated the old scholar's voice of reproof and instruction; then he went on—

"But Charley is not a thoughtless man; he *is* rash. When he came home that time,

and paid the visit to Oxford, of which you know, before he went to Canada—I told you of it, at Portspadron, I think?"

"Yes," said Marian.

"Well, at that time—you won't mind my saying it again—he was almost mad about you. I explained to him all our trouble; there was no need to conceal anything from such a friend as he was, and he was like a man crazy. He would go to London, and carry you off to Canada. There was not one atom of thought or common sense about him. He had no idea of money, and could not have paid for your passage. But I told him we could not spare you—that you were conducting everything as perfectly as if you had been to the manner born, and that he had only to get away and hold his tongue. But you can't imagine how hard he was to manage. He was not open to any argument. He would go to London and spoil all. So I wrote to my mother, and told her Charley was in England, and going to

Canada, and that I advised her not to mention it; so, when her answer came, with very kind messages, but without sending him any invitation, he seemed satisfied, and saw that, if a man can't keep a wife properly, he ought not to deprive her family of her services; and so he took his departure. But, though he wrote to me, I used to think him very cool after that. When we met again, however, it was all right, as you know—in fact, Charley is the creature of impulse, and he is a very hot-tempered fellow. This war, if there is to be one, will give him his best chance, and discipline him a little. He is a wonderful mixture—so boyish, and yet so strong-hearted, and so quick, that he can do the right thing before another man can see what right is. I am very fond of him. It would have been pleasant to have had him at our wedding. Alfred will be there, if he is well enough, and Lizzie has sent for Amy. Good-bye." And Herbert, having arrived at Mrs. Clay-

ford's door, refused to go in, but went away to execute some commissions for Teresa before he had luncheon at Mrs. Belville's.

CHAPTER XIV.

MERCY.

Who saint themselves, they are no saints.
HENRY VAUGHAN.

"MY dear Marian, I daresay you will think me very absurd, and, indeed, I should not deny the accusation if you made it—I should plead guilty with a safe conscience, but if I get an idea into my head, I have great difficulty in getting free from it—indeed, I never do; and so, simply for my own peace, I wear it out, and that is what I have done in the present case, and, as I said to you yesterday, you will be sure to forgive me if I am successful; so to-day I quite look for your approval, for *I*

am successful, my dear—quite so; and it being Sunday, the day after to-morrow she will come here and dine with the servants."

Marian, who never interrupted Mrs. Clayford, and had long ago found out that underneath her many words there were grains of pure gold well worth the gathering, quietly asked,

"Who is she?"

"You know I owed her half-a-crown; naturally, I wished to pay it; so, as I have said before to you, I have now got a habit of looking about for her. I looked as we came home from Mary's last night. I saw an individual in a shawl near one of those objectionable, violently lighted-up places. They are so bad for one's eyes, I quite blink," said Mrs. Clayford; "and, as you know, I am obliged to take care of my sight. I used the eye-water, as you would have advised me, before I went to bed, but I told no one why."

"I am glad of that," said Marian, trying

to keep the melancholy out of her voice; for since her walk with Herbert her heart had felt heavy with fruitless pain. "What was she doing?"

"My dear, I have an impression of oranges or matches; but I have had a policeman on my side, and I got to see him to-day, and said that the poor person to whom I owed half-a-crown was standing at that particular corner last night, and he told me where to go. I went, my dear; I saw her. She was extremely surprised, but I told her who I was, and we talked of Mrs. Trethewry, and she shed tears over Portspadron. I gave her the half-crown, which that other person, whom I did not know, had taken from her, and I said, 'I hope you have good news of your son?'"

"Hester!" exclaimed Marian—"what did she say?"

"She said 'Yes,' my dear. They had heard from him once, on his way to India, by a passing vessel, and she said that he

was well liked in his ship. They had vague thoughts of his seeing Captain Grandison; but I told her that was not likely, and I shall show her a map of the East Indies when she comes. She comes, of course, to see you. I told her you would be interested in hearing all her story, but that she ought not to have left Portspadron in that secret, silent way."

"And he wasn't drowned?"

"No. Jerry was right; and I felt quite convinced myself, though I don't know why. I am not going to lose sight of Hester; she is very poor. It is a scrap of Portspadron come to London, and it pleases me very much."

"Did you see where she lived?"

"Yes, in a humble lodging, but not difficult to find—lodging, in fact, in a room among others which are over a mews, where a cabman lives with his family. I was asked to come again," said Mrs. Clayford, with a humble satisfaction in her visit which Ma-

rian enjoyed very much, "and I shall certainly go. They have several children. It would make Hester popular if you gave her some clothing to take back. But to carry a bundle on Sunday would not be correct. She could come again, perhaps—and, dear Marian, I hope you are pleased?"

Yes; Marian was very much pleased. Pleased with a vague feeling, as if some undefined good was to come to her through this renewed link with the old life in the lost home.

As "the light of music through the vague of sound" brings an unexplained joy to the listener, so this that Marian had been told brought a mysterious whisper of hope with it to a heart that wanted healing. She had no idea of what might come of it, she could not imagine any way in which what had happened might benefit her, but there was in her soul a prophetic gladness, and her whole being felt it. So she thanked and praised Mrs. Clayford, and got

clothes together, as gifts for the cabman's children, and presents for Hester. It made them both quite busy till Hester came, in her best dress, looking neat and clean, and laughably like Portspadron.

Hester's story was short and simple.

"The people took against me. No one knows that truth better than you do, Miss Harcourt. I made no mystery. I said I was going to a friend who wanted me. That friend was my son. A man won't drown who wasn't born to be drowned, you may make sure of that. He was never going to be seen *there* again, after Miss Angerstein's death. But I let him know all about it. He had got married. Nobody knew that. I heard from his wife's mother, and I wrote to her. That was how we kept it up. He tried for four years to lead an on-shore life; but he could not do it. I came up here with her mother. She died. I had learnt London ways by that time, and took to sell this and that. I was

much as I used to be when selling fish, you know. He got into queer company. Queer company always followed my son. But he fled right away after a time, and left wife and two children, and came to me. And I said, 'Go to sea.' He sailed from this port of London, in a fine ship, for the East Indies. She was a sight to see! And I have heard from him. If I had not given his wife the letter, I'd have showed it to you. He was always good at learning, and can write like a schoolmaster. But he's main hopeful to see Captain Grandison."

"I suppose," said Marian, "that we may tell Mrs. Angerstein that your son is safe?"

"Yes. Now that he is respectable, now that so long a time has passed, you may. But till the grass had grown again and again on Miss Angerstein's grave, we were best forgotten. They'll forgive him now for what he couldn't help. But it's ill to be remembered by angry hearts, and to leave

your name on bitter lips brings no good to your memory."

So Hester's tale was told, and her visit was over, and Mrs. Clayford said to Marian, with a sigh, that it was a pity they so seldom wanted a cab!

However, when Herbert's wedding-day arrived, and the party who were to witness it met at church, Mrs. Clayford had found employment for the cabmen of an exceedingly remunerative character, at least for that one day. Servants had to be conveyed from her own and from Mrs. Garret Naylor's house, and also from Mrs. Belville's. Many a whole month's work had been less than that one day brought in to the master of the house where Hester lodged; and a better excuse for clothing all the family, paying the rent that was due, feeding the household, and doing something towards paying a doctor's bill, could never have been imagined.

Hester Sanson moralized upon it; think-

ing more of Mrs. Clayford than of Herbert and his pretty wife, though he was "one of Portspadron born."

Money, food, and clothing came home to Hester with the welcome of personal friends.

"There's many would lead fair lives if they had so much a week steady, and for certain. Out of debt, out of sin. That's an old saying, and a terribly true one," she said.

So Mrs. Clayford kept Herbert Harcourt's wedding-day in a way of her own. Mr. and Mrs. Belville gave a great party that evening, and Mrs. Harcourt, with Lizzie and Frederick Naylor, thought it their duty to be there; but Marian was in her room with a headache. Heartaches are generally called headaches, and Marian only adopted the common phraseology when she so described her illness.

"She has been over-excited. Think how she has loved her brother, how she suffered for him, nursed him, and, indeed, how she

has forgotten herself for all of them—and now he has three thousand a year, and a beautiful house, and a most desirable position among his old friends, and her nearest relations. Marian may take her rest now, and have a headache if she likes," said Mrs. Clayford. "I am delighted to nurse her."

But Mrs. Garret Naylor, to whom all this was said, remembered the events at the Towers, and went to consult Lady Florence Reinecourt.

"We must look after Marian," she said. "She may be worse than my aunt imagines."

These two did look after Marian, and by loving care kept at bay and conquered the nervous fever that the doctor dreaded.

"She is an excellent patient, with such submission and such self-command. Such sudden prostration of the nervous system might have brought death to some people, and a year's inability to others, but Miss Harcourt will soon get well."

"We will go for change of air to Ports-

padron. Mr. Bellingsby suggested it. And we could go to Mrs. Trethewry's. I am sorry to know that Mr. Bellingsby will be from home; but he is to live in his yacht all through the Summer."

Marian consented to Mrs. Clayford's plan, and as soon as she was well she went to that sea-shore where every wave that slowly lifted itself up the sounding sands had a voice of welcome for her. But first she paid a visit to Lizzie, the bright young Queen of the Art-life that she enjoyed and adorned so well.

"Give up Trowberry Terrace," said Lizzie, one day. "I never feel sure of keeping my mother by me while you have it."

"I thought that we all found it useful occasionally. Mrs. Trethewry was there when Herbert married, and it has been a most useful resting-place on many occasions. Then I am so fond of Mrs. Grigshaw."

"So am I. It is delightful to have anyone believe in me, as that dear soul believes.

I have her for an afternoon, and we are both so happy. But we could give Mrs. Grigshaw as much pleasure as we do now, without the lodgings."

"The lodgings are my home," said Marian. "I seldom go there. But our mother must have a home of her own, and so must I. We have such a quantity of things there. It is an impracticable idea."

"Oh! Marian, I think sometimes that things went wrong between you and Charley Grandison. Herbert told me that he loved you. Herbert is a very selfish man. Don't start; I don't mean wickedly selfish. But people are born selfish, just as people are born with blue eyes or black hair. Don't you think so? It ought to be found out for them when they are children, and they should be carefully taught to guard against it. He never had any such lessons. He was always praised, and worshipped, and was always successful. I always knew that he would recover, and that he would marry

Teresa. When I heard of my marriage having vexed Mrs. Belville, and of its having been made a means of separating Teresa from him, I determined never to lose an opportunity for bringing them together again. That was why I went on the first visit to Lady Mawley. I knew they would ask me again. I showed that I wanted to meet Teresa. Without a word passing, Lady Mawley saw my design, and helped me to fulfil it, asking my leave in that pretty little note. It was a great great stroke of genius to get her here. Her mind enlarged perceptibly day by day. She knew my father-in-law was rich, and she could not imagine why he was interested in things that brought money.' 'He does not want money,' she said, one day, with an ignorant stare. 'Why do people speak of him as the great chemist still?' You should have been present when he talked to her. He lighted up the conservatory with the electric light one night, and she laughed like a baby when he

passed her hands through a flame that did not burn her. 'Do you think people get at all that without money?' he said. 'If by money you nurse science, you put it to its greatest earthly purpose. There is only one greater end—when you spend it in God's service.' She grew fond of him; and Herbert, who had always been a little condescending—that is, *I* thought so—discovered that there were other worlds besides his own and Lord Mawley's. Teresa became the reconciler, and explainer of truth. What a good thing it was that they did not marry in their silly state! They are worth something now."

"That is a wholesome doctrine, and I like it. You are wiser than you know of," said Marian.

Then the sisters parted, and Mrs. Clayford took Marian to the salt breeze at Portspadron. It was a dull life at first, in Mrs. Trethewry's well-known, bow-windowed upstairs parlour, where Herbert had been in

his weakness, and where Charley Grandison and Alfred Bellingsby had been day by day to see him. But the weather was perfect, and the country beautiful. There was a welcome in everything, and Mrs. Clayford gave herself airs of independence, making good Amy laugh, as she once more, with her double eyeglasses, picked her way over the uneven stones, or wondered over the fruit trees in flower, with their abundant blossoms. But, best of all, Mrs. Clayford liked listening to the wild, sad cry of the sea-gulls to their young, and she would watch them coming out from the nest, with encouraging, whirling flights, till they dropped on the heaving waves, and stayed there, gently rocking in the bright sunshine, for hours at a time.

It gave freedom to Marian to find that her friend enjoyed the liberty that the life at Portspadron gave her. Certain good boys and girls from school were formed into a small army of protection at the gentle

lady's command. They carried her basket and her fern-knife—she had a green-house and a choice fernery in London; they showed her the way, and answered her questions, and grew remarkably fond of her, for her very helplessness, as well as for Miss Harcourt's sake.

Everywhere she went—into the grounds round the Groves, and among the mud ruins of Hester's cottage. In the evenings she told Marian of her adventures, and heard from her the histories of the past.

"I like going about by myself, Marian. It suits me here. Use your time in your own way. They are always glad to see you at Rosdew. I find Mrs. Perran a delightful old lady. Do you see that grand bouquet of columbines I got in the orchard at the back of their pretty house. I had tea at five o'clock in the honeysuckle parlour. Dr. Perran had been at Trevarna, and he brought back a great piece of news. Your brother has bought the Groves—or is now

buying it. Sir Thomas purchased it, always looking forward to this good time coming, and now it is come. It is even said that they may live here till Frederick Naylor has got their new house completed. He is superintending everything, I hear, and, by Lord Mawley's desire, even designing the gardens. But they will get a yearly holiday, and always spend it here."

This was unexpected tidings to Marian, who went to Rosdew the next day to learn the truth. There what she had heard was confirmed on authority, and they kept her there all day—Sir Thomas delighting in her presence,—and sent the carriage to bring Mrs. Clayford to dinner.

How Marian loved Rosdew! How she wandered through it like a returned child of the house after a long and painful absence! How they rejoiced together over the purchase of the Groves!—"Which I always looked forward to," said Sir Thomas; "and I am glad to have lived to restore it."

But he always looked plaintively at Marian when Herbert and Lizzie were spoken of.

"You ought to have found your mate," he said once, with a genuine sigh of vexation. "If the young could be guided by the mind of the aged——"

"Why, you are not aged," Marian said, stopping him with a laugh. "You are very like your grandfather, I confess. I think so every day when I pass his portrait; but don't talk—or try to talk—like a grandfather, because it does not become you, and it makes me laugh."

"Why did you let Charley go to India?" he asked; and Marian's face grew pale.

So Lady Glaucott took up the subject of the family likeness, and said that it had developed greatly of late years. She liked the portrait very much of which Marian had spoken. Even Mrs. Angerstein had pointed out the likeness the other day; and

Dr. Perran said that *that* Sir Thomas had lived to a grand old age.

"Reynolds had painted him—a face
Filled with a fine, old-fashioned grace;
Fresh-coloured, frank, with never a trace of
Trouble shaded.
The eyes are blue, the hair is drest
In plainest way: one hand is prest
Deep in a flapped canary vest,
With buds brocaded."

The poet who describes so well painted this picture over again, people thought, when they heard those words.

She had drawn off her husband's attention from Marian, but the memory of the events at her northern home almost overpowered her. There had been their last sight of Charley.

After a few days, in the full flush of his happiness, Herbert wrote to Marian.

She had always been so kind, he wrote, and so thoroughly useful—so willing to oblige; and, above all, she had been blessed with the knowledge *how to do it;* he quite depended on her. Could she not get the

Groves ready for him and Teresa? Everything as exactly what it used to be as possible; even to the cream-coloured ponies, if the breed was kept up at Rosdew, as he believed it was. No one could do it as well as she could do it; and he was certain that she would not refuse. He gave her *carte-blanche* for everything. He could not have Teresa's head filled with the table-and-chair questions. Besides, she really did not know enough of such matters; and it would not be of any use to bewilder her. So he would give Marian a commission to reproduce *home*. He concluded, "Be there to receive us. Remember, I want it all to look as if we had never left it; and I depend on you. I hope that you quite understand me."

No one could fail of understanding Herbert's orders. They were always sufficiently direct and to the purpose. And Marian, being provided with money and power, wiped away her tears, answered people's wondering congratulations with well got-up

smiles, and proceeded to do Herbert's bidding.

Sir Thomas and Lady Glaucott helped. Mrs. Clayford showed herself equal to unexpected exertions. All the willing hands and hearts of Portspadron volunteered into the service; and Sir Thomas's steward having returned to his former residence, the Groves was prepared for Herbert with unexampled speed and success. When he came with his bride, their reception was of the most joyous character, scarcely second to that which had greeted Lady Glaucott when she first came to Rosdew.

Marian made tea for her brother and his wife, at the end of the table, as she had done years back, in those unforgotten days. She had engaged David, the former footman, to come back to the more dignified place of butler; the bright June sunset lit up the sea, as it had gone on doing ever since the good days through the dreary years in Trowberry Terrace until now; and

all three went out to the end of the terrace to look at it. There the Ridge rose, with the lazy sheep on its edge; and above the elms round Angersteins the smoke, in an unsteady pillar, trembled up to the sky. As they turned towards the house again, Marian said,

"I must go now—I will come to-morrow about noon."

She took her solitary way, with a cold feeling in her heart, like an eternal farewell. She had given up the home to Teresa; she had no place there any more. "And they are happy!—very happy!—how happy they are!"

This thought quite filled her mind, and a strange sense of surprise accompanied it. She herself was heavy-hearted, though she was strong in health, and courageous in spirit. She could not help being heavy-hearted; she had to bear a grievous burden all alone. But "even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea;" and Marian

was not one to let imagination interfere with truth. Only she had begun to suspect that perhaps people were not sent into this world for that which we call happiness. Everybody at their first start in life expects to be happy. But there may be something better than what the world calls happiness. We may give up *that* blessing if we can attain to a higher. So Marian thought she would trouble no more.

"They are so happy," she said to Mrs. Clayford.

"Ah! yes, my love: May God bless you, Marian!"

A sudden joy sprang up in Marian's heart at those tender words.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEWSPAPER.

Then let come what come may—
What matter if I go mad,
I shall have had my day.

TENNYSON.

YEARS passed by. Three years passed after the visit to Portspadron just recorded, and Marian had not revisited the place or seen Mrs. Angerstein or Alfred. Every year she had seen Sir Thomas and Lady Glaucott in London; and every year they had asked her to the Towers, but she had never been there.

Lizzie still rejoiced in having her mother to live with her; and she and Teresa had both become the mother of a son and a

daughter. Everything that is supposed to bring happiness had come to them; and to Marian had come the great gift of peace. Lady Florence Reinecourt was still her invaluable friend; and Lady Branksome loved her like another daughter. Those two often talked of those days at the Towers, for Lady Florence had no need to conceal things from her mother. They both loved Marian, and both looked with a kind anxiety to her future; but the great secret with which Lady Florence had been entrusted, of Alfred Bellingsby having been struck down by Charley Grandison's hand, had been kept inviolate.

It made a strong tie between her and Marian; never now spoken of, but always acknowledged in their hearts.

After the passage of three years, which had made scarcely any mark in Marian's life, there was war in India. The whole English nation was shocked and excited over news too terrible even to be faithfully

chronicled; and every heart was praying for men, wise in council and strong in heart, to decide on the thing to do, and then to do it, bravely and well. People lived, as it were, only to read the newspapers.

Every day Marian read aloud all that was there recorded to Mrs. Clayford. Mr. Garret Naylor brought her news; his wife brought the commentary that the world was making on the things that were written and read.

Sir Thomas offered himself for active service; Lady Glaucott grew sick at heart for fear of what might be in store for her. Even Alfred Bellingsby regretted his stiffened limbs, which made him unfit for active service by land or sea.

But in the world of social life—that world within a world, in which the people of this story lived and thought—the hero, on whom all eyes were fixed, was Charley Grandison.

At Trevarna, the representatives of those ancient gentry, the Naylors and Garrets, and all those who knew Portspadron and Charley, read the newspapers with greedy eyes. Everything that could fall in the way of a man to bring him into public notice had fallen in Charley's way; and everything that could be said or done to gain public praise, had been said and done by him. The faults—such as they had been—of his youth, had become the virtues of his riper years. The boy's rashness had become, under the pressure of great occasions, the quick-sighted judgment of the man. Wisdom and intrepidity, and an almost supernatural power of foreseeing, and providing for the future, distinguished Charley; and his goodness, tenderness, brotherly kindness, and forgetfulness of self were lauded in private letters and public prints. All that trouble, poverty, and long-enduring love had done for Marian, the great discipline of war had now

done for Charley Grandison. He who, a few years back, had seemed to her, with her hard-working experience, as a boy whose light-heartedness almost fatigued her, and always made her afraid to trust him, was her superior in all things now. She saw his name with respect, meekly listened to his well-earned praise, and yet felt all the time as if these great acts were all deeds of reparation. Mercy for cruelty, patience for anger, forgiveness for vengeance, and the brave man's blow for the cowardly hand of the assassin. So she read it all, with a glad heart and a humble, thankful spirit; for the evil he had done had been done because of her; and the good he had achieved was all for himself.

"He will come home if he lives, strong enough in heart to say he repents; and if he dies he will have proved it."

So she thought; but in these years he had never written a word either to Herbert or to her; but once a note had been en-

closed to Lady Glaucott for her mother. It was when Lizzie's first child was born, to congratulate her upon seeing a grandchild.

His last sentence had been one that Marian could not forget.

"I love those who love me," he had written, quoting an Italian proverb; "you can act for me accordingly."

It was impossible to keep the hero of their lives out of their daily talk. Marian could speak of him now with a steady heart. He was no longer the great intimate sorrow of her life. He had got into the world of heroes, above and beyond her; and Colonel Grandison—as he now was—had become a mighty personage, to be left to himself, and with whom she could take no liberties.

They had drifted apart—he was an object of a silent, unutterable sort of interest, a man daily in her thoughts, at solemn moments, in times of prayer; but the Charley Grandison of early days had faded away. And as this boy-man, who had been by

The months went on, and the reading of the newspapers. Mrs. Clayford was an insatiable seeker after the latest edition; and to read the same things two or three times over was quite an agreeable recreation to her. Marian sat patiently, and never complained; but, when through the week such things had been perseveringly done and patiently suffered, Sunday brought a new duty, for all had to be repeated to Hester Sanson.

It was a fixed rule now for Hester to have her dinner on Sundays at Mrs. Clayford's, and this had got gradually enlarged into at least a ten minutes' gossip with her in the housekeeper's room. Hester had always something to say, and something to inquire about. Her son had taken three voyages to India and back, and he was now going again.

"Gone by this time," she said, one well-remembered day, "and greatly in hopes of bringing home some of our heroes on the

return of his ship. Oh! if he should fall in with our Colonel! There is getting to be a sending home—hostilities"—Hester liked a long word—"hostilities ceasing, they say. There are those sent home who come in these ships upon times, and if he should have the Colonel!"

It made Hester wipe her eyes, and a new thought got into Marian's mind—that this brave man might come back—even soon—very soon—in another six months! She wondered what Sir Thomas would say? But then Marian never herself began a conversation about Colonel Grandison.

But as Hester came week after week, she always renewed her talk of the Colonel coming home, and of her son seeing him. Her son would have a deal to say if he could bless his eyes with the sight of him once more. But she had never been able to make him go to Portspadron; they had all taken against them so, she would say,

returning to the idea which had made her go away.

Mrs. Clayford once asked what her son's wife was doing, and Hester said she was doing well enough. He sent her money. She had been a servant-girl in Hull, and he had seen her there when he was one of the crew of a brigantine loading with coal. She was beneath him, ignorant, and knowing little of home ways, and she had not lived in Hull since he went away; she had settled somewhere else; she had got her direction in the old teapot, which no one wanted to use, the spout being broken off, and she always forwarded news to her when she had got any.

The idea of Colonel Grandison coming back fastened itself on Marian's mind, till it became like a thing to live for. She knew that it grew upon her as the one thing to desire upon earth—for the thing in this life best worth having was to have the opportunity and power of accusing him to his face

of attempting Alfred Bellingsby's life. At this distance from the date of the act, it seemed so easy a thing to do. At a moment when he was so great in the world's estimation that no word of hers could injure him, she felt able to do it without hesitation. It is not too much to say that she longed—that she almost lived to do it. It added energy to her life to think that the day was coming when she should hear him speak. The thought, the hope, the strong intention, gave unwonted life and dignity to her speech and actions. Her friends observed it admiringly.

"Some people are very long reaching their best," said Lady Branksome to her daughter, "and Marian's best will be at eight-and-twenty, I think. Really she deserves a birthday present. What a beautiful woman she is!"

"I know no one to be compared with Marian Harcourt," said Lady Florence; but she gave a sigh for Marian's dull life. "It

all means something," she meditated, "but it is out of sight at present."

Time went on, and talk grew gayer. Officers and men were coming home with their hard-won laurels to a grateful country, and a note from Sir Thomas told her that they should see Charley soon.

"When he is expected, will you come to Rosdew and help to do him honour?" he asked. And Marian answered, "Not to Rosdew—I can't divide myself from my dear Mrs. Clayford. She talks of another visit to Mrs. Trethewry, and, if so, I shall be near enough to rejoice in your gladness. Five years is a long time. Shall I know him again? There is no one in the world that I have a greater wish to see."

CHAPTER XVI.

THEY COME.

Wind, the mighty harper, smote his thunder-harp of pines.
ALEXANDER SMITH.

WHEN the time came, once more Marian and Mrs. Clayford were at Portspadron. Time heals more than broken bones and bad bruises; in Alfred Bellingsby's case, it had so healed his injured heart that he had determined to stay with his mother, and witness Colonel Grandison's return. He was expected by the ship in which Marian knew that Hester's son was sailing. The woman's hopes, as well as her own, were to be fulfilled, and Colonel Grandison was to be watched up the Channel,

and then met in town by Sir Thomas, who would bring him down to Rosdew with the least possible delay. Herbert was making arrangements to be at the Groves.

The fishing time was come again, and the great sea was the object of the constant watch of the many who gathered their treasure thence by day and night.

The season had been one of extreme heat; the sea breezes were unusually welcome.

The passage of the vessel in which Colonel Grandison was to sail was supposed to have been a prosperous one.

Just as they were expecting to get a sight of the ship, and looking out for her every day, there rose a storm of that tremendous sort that sometimes surprises the world in Summer, and which partakes of the hurricane in its nature and force. In the midst of all the danger, the cry arose of a mighty ship beating about in the bay, unable to get into the proper course from which the storm

had driven her, and in circumstances of imminent peril.

She was in sight all one terrible afternoon, at some distance off, but an object of exciting interest and evil prophecy to all on land.

It was not till towards night that the minds of the watchers got comforted by the news that she was getting out to sea, and into her right course. "She must be a stranger, and she must have lost her way," said the fishermen.

But when sleep had fallen on the inhabitants of Portspadron, guns of distress were heard, and the whole place grew suddenly alive with fear in every face—for far off—too far off for instant help—a ship was on the rocks. Every man capable of work rose and left Portspadron. The place was emptied of all but women and children. They got up and did the work of the men as far as they could, driving the cattle to the milking-sheds, turning sheep into fresh

pasture, bringing in wood, and barrowing coal. All harder work ceased, waiting for the return of those who had gone to the assistance of the wrecked.

Marian got up. The wind had lowered, the clear, soft light of the coming day lay glittering on the sea, and she could see everything plainly. Amy Trethewry was with her.

"It is over two miles off—beyond Hecklas. Do you think you could walk to the point? There's an overpowering multitude of them, and I've loaded the little cart, and the fish-people have started with their panniers full of blankets. Madame Angerstein was early there, and Mr. Bellingsby among the first. There is a road to Trevarna, straight from the cove, by the fields, and that will be the best way and the best place for most of them. Why, there's Mr. Bellingsby's lugger out."

"How got the ship here?" asked Marian.

"Ah! you may well ask. Wind and

water make wild masters! When she could not weather the point she thought to get in to the shelter of the land, and was driven on the rocks. It happened once before in my time, with just such another ship—but only once."

"Here's Dr. Perran's stable-boy coming back; he can tell us something."

"Yes," said the youth, out of breath; "I'm on a message for master. They will all be saved."

"How many?"

"Why, hundreds! She's from India, and I've seen the Colonel—the pilot broke his arm, and lost his mind, and a man from Portray said he could put her safe, but he failed—and there's Hester's son. And Mr. Bellingsby went into the water with a life-belt, as strong as ever, and saved the Colonel's life with his own hands. If they can all be got off before high tide there won't be one lost."

He ran away as fast as he could go, to

make up for lost time, and two ideas stayed on Marian's mind—that Charley Grandison had come back, and that Alfred had saved his life.

"Go in. Go home," said Mrs. Trethewry. "I'm going on. I can help the doctor. And if you will go back you can help me. It's more than you can do to stand steady under those great gusts, and the salt is all over your face. Go back to Mrs. Clayford, and keep her heart up, dear lady! You've something to tell her now. See that they put the right pans of milk on the stove, and don't have the dead lights put down in the dairy-window. Go back, my dear, and look about you, and put yourself in my place a bit. Get the rooms ready. I may bring folk home perhaps. There are women and children among the passengers, you may make sure of that."

So Marian got back, by the help of the stout ash stick she had taken to assist her, and Mrs. Trethewry went on to the wreck.

Marian explained it all as well as she could to Mrs. Clayford. She made breakfast, and did Amy's bidding. There was no more to be done. They could only sit and wait. The whole atmosphere on the previous day had been like a great blinding mist, impenetrable to the eye, now they could see far off plainly enough. The waves near the shore looked like moving banks of brown sand, over which the white water foamed, so dark and heavy were they, rearing themselves so solidly, broken and torn by the contrary influences of wind and tide; but far off the deep sea lay green—of its own peculiar hue—beneath the thick white canopy that hid the sky; and there the waves were dashing, with white edges that looked like snow in the great contrast with the colour on which they lay."

"It roars and moans. It is a heart-sinking sound," said Mrs. Clayford. "Dear me, Marian, are you bringing in the tea yourself?"

"Yes. I have just made it out in the kitchen."

"And how far off is the wreck? I wish I could be of use."

"Three miles from this house, I suppose. I could see it as I stood with Amy this morning under Hecklas, and far beyond the Gwinter point. They will all be saved. The tide turned. Before it rises again they will all be safe."

Mrs. Clayford folded her hands, and made silently a short thanksgiving. Marian kissed her, and they had but little to say for the next few minutes. Rain dashed occasionally against the window, and then a gleam of sunshine would burst forth, as if angrily fighting with the wind and rain; for the Summer storm and the Winter one are often very different in character. There is no "shrieking of the mindless wind," as when Winter reigns. In Summer everything about the storm seems to be done with a strong intention.

"It is quite unnatural," said Mrs. Clayford, shuddering as the sun went in, and a sharp, short hail-attack was made upon the window-glass five minutes afterwards. "I wish some one would come in and tell us something."

And her wish was soon granted in the appearance of old Mrs. Perran.

"I don't know why I have come," said the old lady, "and I think I risked my life, for I was very nearly thrown down at the corner. But I believe we women like to flock together in a storm, like the sheep in our orchard. But the wind is nothing now, and our man came back from the wreck, and the coast-guard men have been there ever since this morning, of course, and the Trinity House people, and they are getting the injured and worn-out to the Refuge for distressed mariners—the great white-washed place you can see from the cliff, where a rocket apparatus is kept. And my son sends to me that the Colonel is gone to Rosdew,

and everybody cared for. Angersteins is full of the women, but there are not so very many, and only one child, which was saved in its mother's arms; and, oh! my dears, I am a long time coming to it, but Hester's son saved them, and got a blow from a plank, and sunk—and he is drowned at last! The only life lost, which is a very singular thing, when one comes to think about it."

Amy Trethewry did not come back till the work was done, to use her own words; and this was not till the afternoon. The cart had carried out to her and her husband all that they possessed likely to be of use to the sufferers; and she now returned, driving the willing-footed pony, tired and thankful, hoping out loud that no such sight might ever occur again in her time.

"And there's Hester's boy!—in his coffin already! He had often tried his hand at earning his bread, and just as he had got a bit of butter to it, he is taken away. But

it's all right—that's enough for me. I'm quite content to leave things alone 'pon trust in the Love that knows all things. But I have held the Colonel by the hand; and he kissed me before 'em all—believe me true. There's no change in that heart. Heaven bless him!"

Mrs. Clayford gave one of her tinkling little laughs, enjoying the thought in the midst of the graver things that surrounded it; and Marian felt as if five years of life were rolling away with the clouds, and as if all that had happened was only a ghastly dream. She was restless, full of fears and foolish wonderings. What ought she to do? Would Lady Glaucott expect her? Should she go there? No. She could not possibly go to Rosdew. She wished that Lady Florence could have been there to have advised and helped her; but Lady Florence was at Danesford, with Lord Zoffany, helping to receive Lord Plinborough and his bride. Marian felt sadly

left alone. Only Lady Florence could have helped, and she had never before been so utterly out of reach. There was really nothing for her to do but to sit still. Late in the afternoon their loneliness was happily broken in upon by Sir Thomas. He came in an excitement of happy thanksgiving.

"He is the finest fellow alive," he said. "Charley, of course, Mrs. Clayford. Could you not guess? How should I speak of anyone else?"

Marian's white face attracted no notice. Sir Thomas was too glad for disagreeable observations; but if he could have read what was in Marian's heart, he would have had less cause for rejoicing. Her very courage made her calm. Her great determination made her pale. No one should screen Charley any more. No matter what he now was, he should be shown as that which he once was when he raised his hand against Alfred Bellingsby. Not that she had ceased to feel the old friendship for

this man—perhaps it was stronger than ever, but because above everything she loved *truth*. She only asked one question.

"Has he seen Mr. Bellingsby?"

"No more than this, that he owes his life to Alfred. Of course Charley was helping everyone, and he got a blow on his arm. He had been, like that poor son of Hester's, backwards and forwards—the last to think of his own safety, helping women and children, boys and men—directing them, working with them, being everything and everywhere. Heaven knows that, if that man were my own son, I could not love him more!"

"But about Mr. Bellingsby," said Marian.

"Oh! I was going to tell you. Just when the heaviest of our labours were ceasing, and when men's property—for which there are excellent regulations made, as you know—and not men's lives were in question, a telegram came to Alfred—yes, imagine, brought out by poor old Joan on

the white donkey, because four legs had a better chance in the dying storm than two —that is her own story, not mine. The telegram was from Lord Zoffany, desiring him to proceed instantly to London, to meet Lady Florence Reinecourt on some important business connected with Danesford, as I understand. The wording of the message, Madame Angerstein told me, was so urgent that he thought it right to go immediately, and he is gone. I got Charley to Rosdew, of course, and after a chat with Lady Glaucott, he said that, as he had had a very bad night, he'd go to bed. I never saw anything like the coolness of that fellow," said Sir Thomas. "He's perfectly delightful!"

So he rushed away as suddenly as he had come, and Mrs. Clayford sat chatting in her own way, which did not require an audience, till after tea, when she said she felt fagged and weary, and her maid came and carried her off, early as it was, to bed.

Marian was left to herself in the bow-

windowed room, within hearing of the moaning sea, and watching an angry moon, all red and glaring, rising, and lighting up the stained storm-struck world. It was beautiful, with a disagreeable grandeur. It seemed to tire her to look at it. But there she stayed, gazing and listless, knowing that an hour was at hand of which that which she saw might be a true foreshadowing—storm, and the glare of terrible truth, and then night. And for how long would the darkness be?—and how should she bear, if she should have to bear it—how should she bear the truth which she had so long refused to admit?

Her heart was full of such thoughts as these when, just as it had been before when Herbert was so ill, a step was heard, and a man stood by her, and Charley Grandison said, "Well, here I am, Marian; and you did not marry Bellingsby?—and you'll marry me now, after all? I have never loved anyone else."

She never moved, sitting still in the dusky room, and gazing on the red moon as it rose over the sea with steadily-increasing light. She felt turned to stone. She could not have stood if she had tried to rise, for the hour was come, and he was there.

"Married to Alfred Bellingsby!—no!" she said. "How could I marry a man whom your hand had stricken—whom you had tried to murder? How could I consent to such a thought against you, as I must have consented, if I had become his wife? Not as a promised husband—I had outlived *that* folly—not even as a lover, but as a man, great, and good, and incapable of trying to take another's life in a fit of wild anger and jealousy, incapable of crime—as such a man I had trusted you." She was, in her great agitation, speaking so incoherently that Colonel Grandison could with difficulty gather her meaning. He stooped towards her, holding by the back of her

chair, and fixing his eyes on her pale face with a puzzled look, as if he feared she was losing her senses.

"What do you mean?—whose life was attempted?—tell me what you mean!"

"For heaven's sake, don't disguise the truth, Charley!" she said. "I am half dead through the uncertainty of years. Let me have *truth*. Say at once to me—tell me—we are alone—alone, before God, I accuse you! That night at the Towers, when Alfred Bellingsby was brought in so injured that we expected death, he had been so brought to death's door by *you*. I accuse you. For my sake you did it, because I was going to marry Alfred, preferring him to you, who had left me to fight the battle of life alone; but I know more of that now—it is not with *that* that I reproach you. But I accuse you here—now—as having attempted Alfred's life, and then fled from the sight of the evil you had done."

"On what authority?" asked Colonel Grandison. But there was an ominous change in his voice as he spoke, and Marian shrank away as she heard.

"He saw you, grappled with you, spoke to you, heard *you* speak—heard you say that he should never marry me."

"Alfred Bellingsby said that?"

"Yes."

"And you did not marry him because you could not bear to live with such a witness against *me?*"

"Oh! I could not bear it!" cried Marian. "Think of the dear old life—of your own words—'Trust me, Marian.' You told me to trust you, Charley, and I trusted you to the end."

"My darling!" he said, but she stopped her ears with her hands. "No—listen. Whoever says I raised a hand against any man, in any personal cause, *lies!* I know nothing of Alfred's injuries. He never felt my hand in his life except in friendship.

My heart was torn that day which I so well remember; but you saw the worst of me. I thought I had lost you—lost you for want of words and money. I could hardly tell how it was that I could not persuade you—I could never make out the cause of my want of success. No man on earth can witness against me for evil. Now, which will you believe? If he says he saw me, spoke to me, handled me, he lies—I was never near the bridge. It was base not to accuse me! But what need I care? All I know is that you did not marry him for love of me."

"Not love," said Marian, voicelessly.

"Well, then, call it by another name—for *faith* in *me*."

"I don't know what it was," she sighed, with the tears on her pale cheeks.

"But I do," said Colonel Grandison; "and you are mine. As to this story—we *men* will settle *that*. Rise up, Marian, and look at me. There's a brave girl! I'll get

the smiles back soon. Now you need not speak of this again. Who knows the story besides yourself?"

"His mother, and Lady Florence Reinecourt."

"Is that all?"

"Only those," said Marian.

"I go to London to-night. He is there," said Charley. "I'll tear the truth from him if he lives, at the risk of all that life has to give me. But the man is infatuated. It was an abominable shame not to publish it at the time! But the whole earth shall ring with it now. He ought to apologise to me on his knees. Saw me! How dare he believe his eyes? Voice! Words! Is a man to have his character sworn away in secret, behind his back, and called a murderer for five years on such evidence as that? My darling—you never believed it! You have suffered for your trust, though you never understood what you were to me, or the considerations that kept us apart.

A thousand blessings on my darling, who never believed!"

"I don't know. It almost broke my heart," she said.

"Now good-bye. What a fine thought it was to go to bed! I've had five hours' sleep," said Charley, with his old light-heartedness, which made Marian smile. "And you love me!" he said. She stood in the moonlight, looking at the long, dark shadow of herself on the floor, and she never tried to deny it. "You love me," and he held her for a moment in his arms. "I must go. I shall write. My darling! all my life I will work to reward your trust. I am but a poor fellow for such a woman as you; but I never cared for anyone else."

CHAPTER XVII.

A MEETING.

> What tongue then may explain the various fates
> Which reign o'er earth?
>
> AKENSIDE.

"OH! thank you for coming—coming so soon. Every moment saved is an anxiety the less. Thank you, Mr. Bellingsby."

Lady Florence met him as he came into her room, and he felt in a moment that there was a mixture of sadness and sweetness in her always gentle voice, that meant something more than common, and that had to be explained.

"You had Lord Zoffany's telegram. I

have been there. Mr. Bellingsby, in that room,"—pointing to a door which led out of that in which they were sitting—"in that room is Colonel Grandison's cloak. The man you met on the bridge was Hester's son. They are just the same height and size. In that shadowy place, with the snow about, making all so strange, in your friend's dress, it was a most natural mistake. It is all a secret still. I never betrayed anything. I simply secured the cloak, and telegraphed to you to meet me here. It happened, most happily, the day before my departure, so it made no change in my plan. There is no mistake—the torn collar bears witness; and we can all remember the rest."

Then she opened the door, and walked into the room with Alfred Bellingsby by her side, who was as silent as a dumb man in the presence of the strange garment that was hung on two chairs, very much as it had been once before displayed on that terrible night at the Towers.

"Now sit down here, where we shall not be disturbed," she said, in her pretty, comforting way, "and I will tell you all about it. But I think so much of that man! His wife—she had it—said he was gone to sea."

"There has been a wreck about three miles from Portspadron. I have never been in bed since. I got your telegram when I was giving what help I could. Grandison was there, and all were saved. But the man you speak of, after many acts of heroism, died in saving a woman and a child."

They looked with grave eyes at the Canadian cloak, and there was silence for a minute.

"If a balance of good and evil were struck," said Alfred, in a meditative voice, "great good deeds, and many acts of self-sacrifice, would go to *his* account."

"And his wife said a thing that struck me very much," said Lady Florence, wiping her eyes, and struggling, but not with perfect

success, to steady the tremor in her voice. "But now let me tell you all about it."

"Thank God we never married!" said Alfred.

"Oh! yes, that is quite right of you," she said. "To have found out that the whole story against Colonel Grandison had no existence, with her for your wife—it would have been a painful gladness. For, you remember, the thing that you thought had happened revived her feeling for him very strongly. It would have done very well, if nothing had happened. *He* would have suffered, but she would have kept to her choice. It was all quite clear—to approve of you was a very easy thing to do; but when it acquired a double meaning, and meant disapproval of *him*, then she gave way. It was a great mercy for both of you that your mother decided as she did. But you want to hear, don't you? Now sit down and listen. The story is not long. I have

written it all for Marian, and I will tell it quickly to you."

They sat down, and Lady Florence told her story.

"It has always been said, as soon as Lord Plinborough was engaged to marry Lord Zoffany's sister, Lady Claudia, that I should meet them on their first visit after their marriage at Danesford Hall, so I went there the other day to help to receive them. I have been spending a fortnight there. One day Lady Plinborough asked me to go with her in their pony-carriage to see a poor woman whom she had long known. The woman lived in that outlying part of the estate which touches on Lady Glaucott's property. Her husband was at sea. He had been, a few years ago, disagreeably known to the county police as a dangerous character, concerned in affrays between gamekeepers and poachers. He had suddenly disappeared; but the woman always said he was at sea, and that she received

from him both letters and money. We went to the place. It was a strange, wild spot, and there had been a dispute with your steward as to the ownership. They had built up the house bit by bit, on some common land, and now this woman held to it as her husband's, in spite of threats, and even force. But people shrank from being hard on a deserted wife, and Claudia wanted to go and see her."

"I have heard it," said Alfred. "I gave directions to make her a good compensation, and let her go. She wanted to go—at least, they told me so."

"Quite true," said Lady Florence. "When Claudia and I got there, that was exactly what she told us. She was to go to London, she said, where she had friends, where her husband's mother lived. Of course you understand that she is Dick Sanson's wife?"

"I never knew that till now; but I understand it to be so. Please to go on."

"We reached the house, leaving the pony-carriage nearly a quarter of a mile off, and getting to the place by a foot-way across a bit of heath, and through a group of stunted larch, which grew near a dreadful-looking dark pool of water within a dozen yards of the dwelling. The woman, with wild air, and in woollen petticoats of different lengths and colours, received us with the air of one who had known better days. A girl looked up from a wash-tub, and cried violently when her father's name was mentioned. She was full of talk about the arrangement for buying the place, and she said they were offered it for her husband's life, for a shilling a year as an acknowledgment. But they intended to go to London. She said that she had been brought down in the world, and that her grandmother had kept her carriage. Folk couldn't always come down all great and contented, and turn their hands to work, with only one generation between power

and poverty. They had four rooms upstairs, all running one out of the other; but they only used three; and the other was a lumber room. There were things there that she might be glad to sell. There was a carved oak bedstead all in pieces, tied up together; if we would like to see it, we could easily get up by the step-ladder. This is what Sanson's wife said to us; and I felt for the woman very much.

"Claudia mounted the step-ladder, and I went after her; then the woman came. There was the bedstead; she said that her great-grandfather used to sleep in it, and that there was a coat-of-arms at the back of it, and the date of his grandfather's marriage. Yet this woman was an ignorant creature, not able to read or write.

"'I'll sell you the bedstead, my lady,' she said to Claudia. 'It's all there. I should like it to get back among the quality.'

"On hearing this, we went into the room, and *I saw something*. I said,

"'That is an odd garment hanging up. I should like to buy that, I think.'

"'Tis the best thing that ever could be done with it,' said the woman.

"I said, 'Send your girl for the wrapper out of the carriage, and I will take it home.' It was all done in ten minutes. I said, 'What shall I pay you?'

"'Anything—what you please.' Then, lowering her voice, 'I'd be glad to get it out of the house. Once, after a night out, my husband brought it back. He'd got it on. "Now," he says to me—"now, mother, pull off my boots, and clean 'em quick; unroll these legs of mine, mud tells tales, and put this article where none shall see it. It cost me a hard fight. I was passing Lady Glaucott's," he said to me, "keeping my feet on the turf—they were always so hard when they found anybody after the game. I passed the open door with the light burning, and this cast down just in sight, I took it; then I got to the bridge, and found my-

self followed. I swore he should never have her. Whoever he was, he spoke out —he would have her, he would, but I says he never shall; and we fought, and where he is now he best knows." That was my poor husband's story to me. He went off. I hid the cloak under the wooden bedstead, where it stayed till yesterday. 'Tis five years ago, and I have never seen him since.'"

"And what did you do?" asked Alfred.

"I left Claudia to arrange how the bedstead should be sent to Danesford. I put a sovereign into the woman's hand, and brought back the cloak in the carriage. I packed it up, and came here with it, Lord Zoffany telegraphing for you to meet me. It had been fixed for me to leave them the next day, so I carried off my prize without exciting any suspicion. Here is the torn collar. There can be no mistake."

"I am very glad," said Alfred—"that is all I can say now—very glad. Can you send to Miss Harcourt?"

Lady Florence undertook that, and sent Alfred to the hotel to rest.

"I wish you would promise me not to get up again till to-morrow."

"Oh! I can easily do that," said Alfred, walking away stiffly. "Perhaps you will see after me to-morrow, if I don't appear."

She saw how stiff and tired he was as he limped with difficulty out of the room. She had ordered her carriage to be ready for him.

But all this time, as fast as they could come, Charley and Mrs. Angerstein were travelling together, having unexpectedly fallen in with each other on the way. Charley, in the heat of his wonder and displeasure, had told Mrs. Angerstein that he knew of the accusation against him, and she had given him every particular, as her son had told it.

"But I never for a moment believed anything against you," she said. "I have always expected some explanation would be

given. I was glad for Marian to give up Alfred, for where her faith was so fixed there the best part of her heart was, I made sure."

They went to Lady Florence's together, and they were shown into the room where Charley beheld his Canadian cloak hung out, as if to welcome him. All that had to be known was easily told. But Charley had a grudge against Alfred. Everything had to be told, and there had to be a family council as to how they were to behave to each other.

"Take your wife, and be thankful," said Sir Thomas. "Shake hands, and hold your tongues."

So they were married.

"How shall I ever thank you enough for your woman's faith?" said the happy husband a few months after, while they were in occupation of Rosdew, which had been given up to their use.

"Oh!" said Marian, "woman's faith? What is it?"

Years have passed since these things were, and yet at Portspadron there are not to be found many marks of change. Perhaps Mrs. Angerstein may be a little older —perhaps the tall lame man who visits Patty's grave is a little more bent, though he is strong enough to enjoy life now. The great sea wears its peaceful and apparently unchanging aspect; the *Fairy* lies at her moorings; the sea-birds rock themselves to sleep on the waves. At Rosdew and the Groves children's voices echo, and the weary days of life are all forgotten.

THE END.

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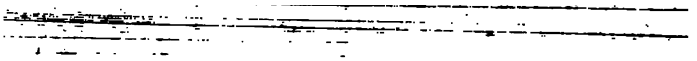

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